Author:
Griffith, Gareth William

Title:
Rhetorical functions of landscape in early middle English literature

Rhetorical Functions of Landscape in Early Middle English Literature

Gareth William Griffith

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol
in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts, Department of English, September 2008

Word Count: 79,424

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which landscape is used. in texts from the English Middle Ages, in order to guide the response of the audience. It begins with an examination of the ways in which landscape was viewed more widely in the medieval period, especially the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. tracing literary theories derived from study of the Bible and arguing that these theories were likely to have been carried across into reading secular texts. I also examine some of the Biblical and classical archetypes that shaped literary understanding of particular landscape features.

From this basis, I go on to examine the uses of landscape in three distinct groups of texts: Arthurian chronicles, debate poems, and anchoritic writings. These texts are centred on England and the lands under English control in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but some reference is made to the development of trends beyond this period. The three text-groups, taken togther, are intended to show that the symbolic and rhetorical use of landscape was not a specialist technique limited to one particular genre, but a more widespread habit of thought in literate classes of the period.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED..... DATE.22/12/08.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due firstly to Ad Putter, wisest, best and most humane of supervisors, for seeing this thesis through to completion. I am deeply grateful to him for his guidance and encouragement, and for the generosity with which he has allowed me to benefit from his time, his knowledge, his library and his friendship. He has saved me from blind alleys and errors on many occasions, and those that remain do so in spite of rather than because of him.

I would also like to thank all the medievalists at the University of Bristol, staff and postgraduates, for their friendship, encouragement and help, and for making it such a stimulating and pleasurable place to study. In particular, I am grateful to Elizabeth Archibald and Myra Stokes for their advice on early drafts of parts of the thesis, and to Beth Williamson for her help on the history of church architecture.

I owe a debt too to all those friends, in various places, who encouraged me through the process of writing this thesis, and who helped me keep going. They are too numerous to mention, but certainly not forgotten.

My greatest thanks are due closer to home. That I was able to attempt this thesis at all is due to my parents, who enabled and encouraged me to study from the beginning. I hope that they can take some pride in what has resulted from their hard work over so many years. Most of all, I owe thanks to my wife Sonia, who unhesitatingly agreed that I should go back to academic life at a point when we could barely afford for me to do so, and who has been unflinching in her practical help and active encouragement every day since then, in spite of the sacrifices of time and other things which it cost her. Without her, there would be no thesis at all, and therefore it is to her that I dedicate it, as a small but very grateful recompense for all that I owe her.

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Surely everyone must realise how rash it is to make any judgement about someone else's mind and capacity for understanding, since men's hearts and thoughts are open to God alone.
Peter Abelard, preface to Sic et non.[1]

Introduction: Meaning and Landscape

To study the Middle Ages from the perspective of the twenty-first century is to be aware of an enormous difference between western Europe then and now. Inevitably there are many examples of continuity, but the first impression is usually one of strangeness. Language, aesthetics, transport, education, political systems, sexual behaviour, health and hygiene, the power of the church, lay beliefs about religion, scientific understanding, the roles of men and women, and many other areas of life have undergone enormous change between the end of the period under scrutiny and the present day.

To this list of changes a further important idea may be added, that of 'meaning'. In the category of meaning the past four centuries have witnessed a fundamental change in the world views held by both the (proportionately few) people who left behind them written evidence of their thinking and, I strongly suspect, by the many who could leave no such trace. There has been a gradual erosion of trust in the idea that the universe has any inherent objective meaning, that is to say any meaning beyond that which a community or individual attributes to it.[2] In general, medieval thinking saw the universe as coherent,

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[1] From the translation in A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott with David Wallace, eds, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 87-100, p. 88.
[2] 'Arguments about meaning are always possible, and in that sense meaning is undecided, always to be decided, subject to decisions which are never irrevocable.' Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 1997), p. 67.

elegant and meaningful.[3] Doubtless there were always sceptics, and it would be utterly misleading to present the Middle Ages as a period (or periods) of complete intellectual unanimity, but this was the strong consensus. By contrast, the succeeding centuries saw an increasingly radical scepticism in European thought, whether derived from David Hume, Bishop Berkeley or Jacques Derrida. By the end of the twentieth century, the belief was widely held that we cannot be sure we will ever understand exactly *how* the universe is, and with regard to *why* it is, there is not only no answer, but also no real question to be asked.

This is indeed a long way from mainstream intellectual opinion in the Middle Ages. For medieval thinkers the world was not just a phenomenon but a creation, the product of divine action. Moreover, it emanated not just from *a* divine creator, but *the* divine creator, the Christian God whom St. John could describe as not just showing but actually being love (1 John 4.8, 16). The universe was therefore imbued inevitably not only with purpose but with beneficent purpose, and nothing was wasted or without reason. Thus everything had a meaning, a piece of information from God himself. Moreover, since he was a good God, he would not make it impossible for this meaning to be discovered and understood, as if sending a letter to someone in a language they could not read. It was practically a Christian duty, therefore, to decode the information God had written into his universe. This understanding had more than theological implications. Immediately, it meant that the physical world and the Bible were fit subjects to be studied for symbolic meanings. But once

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[3] The best introduction to this remains C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, 1994).

acquired, the habit of looking for meaning in objects or situations that to subsequent centuries might appear incidental or neutral was carried from the realm of Biblical exegesis into the reading and writing of other texts. To talk of 'literary theory' in the Middle Ages is anachronistic inasmuch as the term did not exist in any of the three languages (Latin, English and French) that will be the prime foci of this study. Nevertheless, as scholars such as Minnis have shown,[4] there was a sophisticated body of theoretical writing and thought dealing with issues that would now fall within the concerns of literary theory. These ideas were developed over centuries, and whilst they owed much to the thought of ancient Greece and Rome, their primary goal in the medieval period was to deal with problems that arose in the interpretation of the Bible. It is to be expected, therefore, given that the predominant medieval theories of reading and textuality were developed with the Bible in mind, that the understanding of meaning in the Bible (as outlined above) will also spill over into the medieval perceptions of non-Biblical texts.

This is all the more true given that the boundaries separating sacred from religious from secular writing were not as definite as they might later appear. For example, Hugh of St. Victor is happy, in his *Didascalicon*, to include the writings of the church fathers as Scripture, eliding to an extent the distinction between the divinely- and the humanly-authored text.[5] Similarly, texts such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were taught in the schools not simply as examples of the prosodic style to which medieval writers ought to aspire, but

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[4] A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, (London, 1984). See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., eds, *The Idea of the Vernacular: an anthology of Middle English literary theory, 1280-1520* (Exeter, 1999).

also as moral exempla.[6] The narratives of these poems were taken as illustrating virtuous behaviour or warning against sinful behaviour, often reading against the grain of surface meaning but through the lens of reading methods designed for the Bible.

These, then, are the interpretations and assumptions that underlie the current study. They may be summarised as positing that every bit of information that we are given as audience in medieval literature potentially conveys meaning above and beyond its simple denotative sense. Very little is said in these texts which does not repay closer attention than it might at first appear to warrant. In itself, this is a truism. Words always have more than a denotative power in any text, and medieval writing is no exception. The difference is that when reading texts from a culture so different from one's own, it takes additional effort to become familiar with the connotations that words, ideas and images carried in that context. The present study is an attempt to do just this.

Yet if it is important not to ignore details, it is equally important not to be careless or exercise too much ingenuity when doing so. It is unhelpful, for example, to talk of 'codes', as though each medieval poem or devotional text contained a hidden meaning, for which what I shall call the 'surface narrative' is nothing more than a cloak. When textual details indirectly convey hints and information to the audience, they do so in service of the surface narrative. They may confirm or question, strengthen or undermine the surface narrative, but

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[5] *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. and ed. Jerome Taylor (New York and London, 1961), IV.ii.
[6] L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1992), p. 111.

never ignore it. Medieval readers or hearers would have no need of any such study as I propose here, since they would pick up on the hints given in the details without needing to be taught, indeed often without even realising that they are doing so. It is for this reason, perhaps above all others, that I suggest such a study has merit, in that it aims to help us as post-medieval readers to rediscover to a degree the bundle of perceptions and understandings that audiences in the Middle Ages brought to these texts, and that thus constituted a medieval worldview or views.

It remains to explain why I have chosen to focus on the subject of landscape, and on the texts that will feature in the pages that follow. The choice of landscape as an area of study is to an extent an arbitrary one, since other 'background' details might equally fruitfully be examined, such as food and drink, animals or clothing. I chose landscape initially because I was intrigued by the ways in which it was used in particular texts that I had read, such as *The Owl and The Nightingale*. In pursuing this further I realised that there were many references to landscape in texts both well known and more obscure which had not been appreciated fully in their context. Moreover, there is a strong and continuing strand of scholarly thought which suggests that landscape is an important key to understanding texts, and other artefacts from the past. Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of the *chronotope*, the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature', through which 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of

time, plot and history.'[7] In this way, Bakhtin proposes, the surroundings and the events that take place within them are intimately connected, and one cannot be understood without the other. More recently, Guy Hedreen has applied a similar principle to an examination of the narratives portrayed on Greek vases, arguing that 'setting often provides information that helps to explain why stories turn out in the ways that they do.'[8] There are enormous differences between the objects and contexts in Hedreen's study and those in mine, but I hope to demonstrate that this principle is applicable to both.

Inevitably, since I could not hope to study every text from the period, I have had to be selective about which ones to include in this thesis. In doing so I have endeavoured to focus upon those that I felt would be particularly illuminated and illuminating as a result of this approach, whilst at the same time combining to provide a coherent (if necessarily partial) survey of the period and the subject. I hope it will become clear that all the texts I have chosen to examine in what follows merit their inclusion in my study. Nevertheless, it is certain that I have not included all of the texts that would have helped to make my case, or of which a better understanding can be gained through studying the landscape settings and descriptions within them. The only way to avoid such omissions would be to narrow the scope of my investigation, which I have chosen not to do, for the following reason. One of the accusations that could be levelled against my thesis is that it is trivial, pernickety, over-ingenious, and that it succeeds only in creating mare's nests, rather than deepening our

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[7] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist, pp. 84-258, at p. 84.

understanding of medieval texts. In an attempt to answer this charge, I have tried to draw on texts from as wide a field as possible, so as to illustrate the pervasiveness of the rhetorical uses of landscape that are my object of study.

To this end, I have chosen to focus on three different types of texts: debate poems, Arthurian chronicles, and writings for or by anchorites. By examining texts from these three groups, which are drawn from the fields of literary, pseudo-historical and religious writing, I hope to show that the phenomenon I describe is not limited to one way of writing or texts with only one purpose. Rather than a specialist technique used by writers of a certain genre, the rhetorical impact of landscape can be observed across a variety of genres in different periods.

A full justification for the choice of individual texts must be left to the chapters concerned with them in turn, but a few comments on the choice of genres are in order here. In each of the three categories (debate, chronicle, anchoritic writing) there are circumstances which make the idea of landscape worthy of attention. When anchorites, that is to say women (mostly) and men who have chosen to reject the physical world as far as possible, are encouraged to perceive and understand their spiritual lives in terms borrowed from the description of landscape, intriguing paradoxes are created, which I examine in detail in chapter 4. Landscape can also be a means of exploring why the debate form was so appealing to poets throughout the medieval period, and how this particular way of structuring material developed from and in relation to other

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[8] Guy Hedreen, *Capturing Troy: The Narrative Functions of Landscape in Archaic and Early*

genres or literary conventions. Such are the questions I address in chapter 3. Whilst the landscapes of Arthurian romance have received a considerable amount of attention from scholars in recent years, those from the Arthurian texts that owe more to the chronicle tradition have not undergone similar scrutiny, and so chapter 2 is an attempt to redress this imbalance to an extent. In the process, I hope to shed some light on the ways in which Arthurian chronicles manage to create an illusion of veracity so effectively.

However, before considering any of these I need to examine the written landscapes that were most familiar to the minds of medieval writers. If we are to understand the ways in which these poets, chroniclers and clerics used landscape in their own works, we need to know what expectations of written landscape they brought to their writing as a result of the texts that they had read. In order to do this, I shall spend my first chapter examining the mental and textual landscapes that were inherited by the Middle Ages through the Bible and through the texts preserved from the classical civilisations of the past, chiefly ancient Rome. By reading what they read, and attempting to trace the ways in which these landscapes of the mind were interpreted, re-interpreted, used and creatively rewritten, I hope that it will be possible to gain an insight into the medieval perceptions of landscapes. This will both provide specific examples of important mental landscapes and the potential significances with which features such as valleys and hills could be laden, but also illustrate some of the processes which written or named landscapes underwent in the period, and why they did so. It is to this that I shall therefore now turn.

Classical Greek Art (Ann Arbor, 2001), p. 1.

Chapter 1:

Ways of reading landscape

This dissertation is an attempt to contribute to the burgeoning study of the medieval understanding of space and place.[9] This is inevitably an enormous subject, encompassing as it does areas such as mapping, geography, cosmology, ritual practice, drama, theology, and memory, but my focus will be on literary works. More specifically, I am seeking to elucidate the ways in which literary works from England in the Middle English period (for the purposes of this study, c.1100 to c.1450) use landscape and other constructions of space in order to guide but also to manipulate the reader. Later chapters will examine these texts in detail, looking at groups of texts that I believe to be particularly revealing, or under-studied, and the way in which they use imaginary spaces to these ends.

However, before proceeding to such an analysis, I want first to attempt to recreate something of the intellectual climate in which these literary authors wrote. This is important if we are to have access to the ways in which such authors thought about space and landscape, and for us to come to it with their preconceptions rather than our own. It is of course impossible to do any such thing perfectly, but even a failed attempt will, I hope, shed light on how the writers may have intended their works to be read, or how they may have been read, contrary to those intentions, by contemporaries.

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[9] See for example Naomi Reed Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm* (Woodbridge, 2001); Jean Verdon, *Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. George Horloch (Notre Dame, 2003); Daniel Birkholz, *The King's Two Maps: Cartography and Culture in Thirteenth Century England* (London, 2004); Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, eds. *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis, 2000); Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and*

In order to do this, I will pay attention in this chapter to the inheritance from Latin texts of the Classical and early medieval eras, focusing on those literary texts which were popular in my period, and in which space and landscape descriptions are prominent. Equally important are texts dealing with methods of ordering and arranging thought, for mnemonic purposes. I will then go on to look in detail at the landscapes which medieval writers inherited from the Bible, tracing how these landscapes were interpreted, remembered and re-imagined in theological works, but also in secular literature. In doing so, I hope to outline some of the 'repertoire' of imaginary or mental landscapes that was available to writers in the Middle English period, and which may have influenced them in the creation of their own.

The 'spatiality' of thought in the Middle Ages

The key assumption underpinning my approach in this thesis is that landscape in medieval texts is capable of being a means of stimulating or even organising thought. Since this is key to my argument, it will be worth taking some trouble to establish it at length. There are certainly no grounds for thinking that all occurrences of landscape in medieval literature must be performing a mnemonic or allusive function, and nothing that follows should be taken as arguing for such a radical approach to all medieval literary landscapes. Nevertheless, evidence for some of the habits of thought that were developed in the scholarly tradition of this period suggests that these techniques would also be ideally suited to reading at least some literary landscapes in this way.

Seasons of the Medieval World (Toronto, 1973); Leonard Cantor, ed., *The English Medieval*

My contention that landscapes can structure and communicate thought draws partly on the extensive work on the medieval theories and practices associated with thought and memory that has been done by Mary Carruthers.[10] Summarising her conclusions, she states that 'All human knowledge, it was thought, depends on memory, and so it is all retained in images, fictions gathered into several mental "places" and regrouped in new places as the thinking mind draws them together.'[11] More than this, Carruthers has elsewhere argued that the Classical model of memory bequeathed to the Middle Ages was unavoidable: 'Some type of locational structure is a prerequisite for any inventive thinking at all.'[12]

Such a conclusion receives support from scholars working in the more general field of metaphor and human thought:

> Most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors [...] In some cases spatialization is so essential a part of a concept that it is difficult for us to imagine any alternative metaphor that might structure the concept.[13]

If this is so, and all human cultures must perforce use 'some type of locational structure' in their modes of thought and expression, it is also true that the specific

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Landscape (London, 1982).

[10] See Mary Carruthers, *The Craft Of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, And The Making Of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, 1998); *The Book Of Memory: A Study Of Memory In Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990); and Mary Carruthers and J.M. Ziolkowski, eds, *The Medieval Craft Of Memory: An Anthology Of Texts And Pictures* (Philadelphia, 2002). For an alternative and stimulating discussion of the medieval role of images and space in structuring thought, see V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* (Stanford, 1984), and also James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 236-71.

[11] Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, p. 8.

[12] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 12.

[13] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 17-18. For specific examples of foundational human spatial metaphors, see pp. 14-21; for a thought-

structures used by any particular culture or text will help to individuate it from other cultures and other texts (as well as showing how it relates to them). In other words, close study of the ways in which medieval texts use landscape will help us to understand the texts better, and also to understand what makes the Middle Ages medieval.

Medieval spatial theories of memory existed in a variety of forms and were developed in different directions by many writers, but almost all were to some degree indebted to St. Augustine, specifically the tenth book of his *Confessiones*.[14] His concept of *memoria* is more comprehensive than modern ideas of memory, covering much that later theories would consider 'thought'. Indeed, he himself points out (X.xiv.21) that in the everyday usage of his time, '[w]e call memory itself the mind' (*ipsam memoriam vocantes animum*). Memory is concerned with 'objects brought in by sense-perception' (*res sensis invectarum*) (X.viii.12) but also ideas that are 'not touched by sense perception [...] nor [...] seen independently of my mind'. Yet however objects arrive in it, memory itself is repeatedly conceived of in concrete spatial terms. At the beginning of his discussion (X.viii.12), Augustine refers to 'the fields and vast palaces of memory' (*campi et lata prætoria memoriæ*), and elsewhere it is a 'vast hall' (*aula ingens*) (X.viii.14). Alongside this predominantly architectural imagery, there is the important idea of 'Memory's huge cavern, with its mysterious, secret, and indescribable nooks and crannies' (*grandis memoriæ recessus, et nescio qui secreti atque ineffabiles sinus eius*) (X.viii.13), 'the broad

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provoking examination of the pervasiveness of metaphor in all branches of human knowledge, and the implications that this has, see the 'Afterword' added to the second edition, pp. 243-74.

plains and caves and caverns of my memory' (*campi et antra et cavernae innumerabilia*) (X.xvii.26). When he discusses innate ideas, he argues that they must have been 'already in the memory, but so remote and pushed into the background, as if in secret caverns' (*iam erant in memoria, sed tam remota et retrusa quasi in caveis abditioribus*) (X.x.17). These are clearly metaphorical ways of talking about memory (note the *quasi* in the last quotation), since in purely physical terms it is absurd for Augustine to imagine that the inside of his own body is a 'vast hall'. Yet the reiteration of these ideas creates a strong spatial conception of memory, and these passages may have contributed to medieval conceptions not only of memory but also of caves.

Moreover, as Augustine's argument develops, he seems increasingly interested in exploring the paradoxes caused by the use of these spatial metaphors, pushing closer to literalism in order to see the effects caused. So, in X.xxv.36 he asks 'But where in my consciousness, Lord, do you dwell? Where in it do you make your home?'[15] Reviewing the different kinds of ideas and objects that memory furnishes and the places in which they are stored, he rejects each in turn and is forced to confess that the question is unanswerable. In doing so, he abandons the idea of real places in the mind, but only after having explored it to breaking point. Not for the only time in the *Confessiones*, there is a danger that the rejected idea is more memorable than the correction that Augustine subsequently proposes to it: 'Why do I ask in which area of my memory you dwell, as if there really are places there? Surely my memory is

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[14] Latin text from J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus: Series Latina* (henceforward *PL*), xxxii (Paris, 1845); English quotations taken from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1998).

[15] *Sed ubi manes in memoria mea, Domine, ubi illic manes? Quale cubile fabricasti illic tibi?*

where you dwell, because I remember you since I first learnt of you, and I find you there when I think of you.'[16] This is a curiously paradoxical statement, the first sentence denying that there 'really are places' in memory, but the second asserting that God does in some sense 'dwell' in Augustine's memory. This paradox is necessary in order to allow Augustine to proceed to the next stage of his argument, the question as to where God could be found, if he did not pre-exist in the mind and had to be learnt or discovered. To this he can only answer (X.xxvi.37) 'There is no place, whether we go backwards or forwards, there can be no question of place.'[17] This rejection of the idea of place is anticipated in an earlier remark (X.ix.16), which seems at that stage merely to be a reminder that 'place' in this discourse is a metaphor, one of the paradoxical turns of phrase of which Augustine is so fond, as he argues that all he has learnt from his liberal education is kept 'pushed into the background in some interior place – which is not a place' (*quasi remota interiore loco, non loco*). With hindsight, it seems that this seemingly offhand modifying clause ('which is not a place') is part of a deliberate strategy developed through the paragraphs on *memoria*, and that the early hint paves the way for the later discussion of space in relation to the idea of God.

Thus for Augustine God cannot be located, only experienced and known as transcendent. Yet the act of knowing God creates an idea of God, which must be located in memory, and memory itself can be conceived of in spatial terms. In this passage, spatial concepts are ultimately proved inadequate as means of

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[16] *Et quid quæro quo loco eius habites, quasi vero loca ibi sint? Habitas certe in ea, quoniam tui memini ex quo te didici, et in ea te invenio cum recordor te.*
[17] *Et nusquam locus, et recedimus, et accedimus, et nusquam locus.*

understanding God, but for Augustine they are an important way to understand how we understand God (and everything else).

Moreover, the space of memory is not random or chaotic. There are perceptibly different regions within it. We have already seen this, in the mention of the 'background' and the 'most secret caverns' where innate ideas are discovered and found to be true (X.x.17), and in the comment about the 'interior place – which is not a place' where the skills reside. These presuppose a distinction between such hard-to-reach areas of the memorial cavern and other areas more regularly frequented by the mind. Augustine goes further, suggesting (X.viii.13) that there is a degree of organisation within this space of memory, since '[m]emory preserves in distinct particulars and general categories all the perceptions which have entered'.[18] His point is a simple one, namely that the mind is capable of distinguishing each idea and sense impression from all the others, and also of understanding which ideas and impressions belong together by their nature. His manner of expressing this idea is not explicitly spatial, but in conjunction with his more general spatial conception of the mind, it paved the way for later writers and thinkers to conceive more elaborate schemata of mental geography.

If Augustine's concern (at least ostensibly) in Book X of the *Confessiones* is with understanding how the mind works and the processes of ontology, writers in the high Middle Ages were at least as much preoccupied with the co-ordination and codification of all knowledge, and its harmonisation

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[18] *Ibi sunt omnia distincte generatimque servata, quæ suo quæque aditu ingesta sunt.*

into one coherent and aesthetically pleasing whole. The motivations for such schemes were diverse, including a respect for the written word (itself a product of the economic value of codices, the comparative rarity of literacy, and a culture centred around a sacred text) that made it hard to argue that statements written down were wrong, and a desire inherited from Augustine and the other early intellectuals of the Church to show that Christian learning was not incompatible with the ideas and texts central to the classical curriculum, and which were therefore so dear to many of those early Christian writers. There was also (as I shall go on to examine below) a sense that the intelligible creation ought to reflect the attributes of its Creator, in its beauty, coherence and essential unity. C.S. Lewis described this attitude of mind memorably: 'There was nothing which medieval people liked better, or did better, than sorting out and tidying up. Of all our modern inventions I suspect that they would most have admired the card index.'[19]

It is therefore easy to see why a writer such as Richard of Fournival should use landscape image to illustrate the various branches of human learning and their inter-relation. Now known chiefly for his *Bestiare d'Amour*, which is ample evidence of his allegorising bent, Fournival also wrote the curious *Biblionomia*, which recent scholars have asserted to be not merely a flight of fancy but 'the actual catalogue of Fournival's carefully collected library'.[20] His plan in this work has been summarised thus:

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[19] Lewis, *Discarded Image*, p. 10.
[20] Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, p. 116. The manuscript of the *Biblionomia* has been published as both facsimile and edition; see H.J. de Vleeschauwer, 'La BIBLIONOMIA de Richard de Fournival', *Mousaion* 62 (1965). For evidence that Fournival was describing his own library in this work, see R.H. Rouse, 'Manuscripts belonging to Richard of Fournival', *Revue d'histoire des textes* 3 (1973), 242-69.

> [Fournival] lays out the literature and wisdom of the world for the guidance of his fellow citizens in the form of an elaborate garden in which the various branches of knowledge each have their plot. This charming analogy quickly crystallizes into a picture of a library in which the books are laid out on desks according to their subject.[21]

Fournival's image of the garden allows him to conflate several ideas, including the library, the knowledge held within it, and the cultivated natural world. It is, in fact, a reversal of the more usual post-medieval understanding of the relationship between what we might think of as library and garden. Whereas modern readers might consider the thought embodied in books as reflecting or interpreting the 'real world', here the concrete, outdoor phenomenon of the garden becomes merely a vehicle for metaphorical learning contained in the library.

There were also, of course, practical advantages to conceiving of knowledge in spatial terms. Hugh of St. Victor outlined these in the opening paragraph of his treatise *De tribus maximis circumstatiis gestorum*:[22]

> Their [sc. the treasures of knowledge] orderly arrangement is clarity of knowledge. Dispose and separate each thing into its own place, this into its and that into its, so that you may know what has been placed here and what there. Confusion is the mother of ignorance and forgetfulness, but orderly arrangement illuminates the intelligence and secures memory.[23]

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[21] Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, p. 116. The word that Fournival himself uses most often to describe the garden image in his text is *areola*, there being one *areola* for each branch of knowledge.

[22] All Latin quotations from this text are from William M. Green, 'Hugo of St Victor: *De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum*', *Speculum* 18 (1943), 484-98. All English translations of this text are from the translation by Mary Carruthers, in Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, pp. 32-40; for clarity, Carruthers's additions to the text are shown by { }, mine by [ ].

[23] *Dispositio ordinis illustratio est cognitionis. Dispone et distingue singula locis suis, seorsum ista et seorsum illa, ut scias quid ibi et quid ibi collocatum sit. Confusio ignorantiæ et oblivionis mater est, discretio autem intelligentiam illuminat et memoriam confirmat.* (*De tribus maximis* 488, lines 9-12.)

Care in arrangement of knowledge was thus taught, at least from the twelfth century onwards, as key to the use of memory as recall, but also to the use of memory as combination.

Hugh goes on to assert that 'Matters that are learned are classified in the memory in three ways; by number, location, and occasion.'[24] In fact, the numerical method itself owes much to spatial conceptions. Hugh commands his pupil '[l]earn to construct in your mind a line {of numbers} numbered from one on, in however long a sequence you want, extended as it were before the eyes of your mind.'[25] Once this mental equipment is provided, the method of using it is explained: 'When you hear any number at all called out, become accustomed to quickly turning your mind there {on your mental line} where its sum is enclosed, as though to that specific point at which in full this number is completed.'[26] The language of 'there' and 'that specific point' makes clear the spatial basis of this technique.

Hugh's actual locational technique, however, depends initially on spatial relationships between place and idea that do exist in the real world of experience. He notes how much easier it is for a student to learn something from a book when he reads it all in one copy of the text, rather than changing copies.

> it is a great value for fixing a memory-image that when we read books, we strive to impress on our memory through the power of forming our mental images not only the

[24] *Tribus modis discernenda sunt in animo ea quæ discuntur, secundum numerum, secundum locum, et secundum tempus.* (*De tribus maximis* 489, lines 14-15.)
[25] *Disce contemplari in animo tuo lineam naturalis numeri ab uno in quamlibet longam porrectionem quasi ante oculos cordis tui extensam.* (*De tribus maximis* 489, lines 18-19.)
[26] *Deinde cum audieris quemlibet numerum nominari, velociter ibi cogitationem inflectere assuesce, ubi summa eius clauditur, quasi ad illud punctum quo in supremo ipse numerus terminatur.* (*De tribus maximis* 489, lines 20-22.)

> number and order of verses or ideas, but at the same time the colour, shape, position, and placement of the letters, where we have seen this or that written, in what part, in what location (at the top, the middle or the bottom) we saw it positioned, in what colour we observed the trace of the letter or the ornamented surface of the parchment.[27]

This approach to memory may seem characteristically medieval, concentrated as it is on the experience of a book, but Hugh goes on to apply it to other channels through which his students might encounter knowledge that they wish to remember:

> [T]ogether with the appearance and quality or location of the places in which we heard one thing or another, we recall also the face and habits of the people from whom we learned this and that and, if there are any, the things that accompany the performance of a certain activity.[28]

Just as with the number technique, where Hugh encourages his students to visualise 'any number at all' that they hear called out, as a means of practising their skills, so here he tells them to apply the spatial-memory skills used in reading to their experiences away from the codex. This seems principally to be commended in order to make the technique more effective when applying it to the written text, but it also suggests that it would be a habit of mind in interpreting all information that its practitioners encountered. This would include scholarly texts, but also 'real-life' experiences, and (crucially for the current study) literary texts as well. In this approach, location and other attendant circumstances are always capable of being means for marking out

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[27] *Multum ergo valet ad memoriam confirmandum ut, cum libros legimus, non solum numerum et ordinem versuum vel sententiarum, sed etiam ipsum colorem et formam simul et situm positionemque litterarum per imaginationem memoriæ imprimere studeamus, ubi illud et ubi illud scriptum vidimus, qua parte, quo loco (suppremo, medio, vel imo) constitutum aspeximus, quo colore tractum litteræ vel faciem membranæ ornatem intuiti sumus.* (*De tribus maximis* 490, lines 19-25.)

[28] *cum faciem et qualitatem sive situm locorum reminiscimur ubi illud vel illud audivimus, vultus quoque et habitus personarum a quibus illa vel illa didiscimus, et si qua sunt talia quæ gestionem cuiuslibet negotii comitantur.* (*De tribus maximis* 490, lines 27-30.)

didactic or narrative content, and for rendering them more memorable because of their mental imaging.

Hugh not only outlined the principles behind this mnemonic method, but more famously provided a worked example of its use. His *Libellus de formatione arche* (also known as *De Arca Noe mystica*) is an extended set of instructions for drawing a diagram of Noah's Ark, in order that each dimension can be given a spiritual significance. The purpose is for a large amount of doctrine to be invested in a single image. Such an image could then be comprehended as a whole, incidentally suggesting the logical integrity of the doctrine it embodies, but even more importantly working as a systematic mnemonic aid.

Hugh was by no means alone in adopting this kind of technique. Over two centuries later and several hundred miles to the south-west, the Catalan Franciscan Francesc Eliximenis wrote a Latin treatise called *Ars prædicandi populo*, in which as part of his advice to preachers he explained the mnemonic usefulness of mental images:[29]

> Words are difficult to remember, because for each one some similitude or figure must be imagined. But when we have to remember things, then a single similitude or figure will represent a whole story to us, just as Christ's cross indicates to us the entire sequence of events of the passion of Christ and the image of a king with a lance will signify to us a victory in some battle.[30]

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[29] All quotations from Eliximenis are taken from the translation of extracts from his work included in Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, pp. 192-204.
[30] Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, pp. 197-8.

This passage is notable for a number of reasons, not least its demonstration of the durability of the techniques used by Hugh of St Victor (above). Just as striking, and important for my purposes, is the fact that alongside the image of the cross, a specifically Christian application of this technique, there is also the *exemplum* of the king with a lance. To be sure, such imagery could be used for specifically religious ends, and Christian thought abounds in imagery of battle and conquest, but this does not seem to be the case here. The intellectual tools that were developed for use in a preaching context had wider applicability and were not restricted to religious narratives. Eliximenis goes on to re-iterate the specifically locational nature of one form of image-based mnemonics, stating that 'Tully' (i.e. Cicero) required of the orator that 'he know how to invent a copious number of places and to order them well, and to discover quickly a resemblance between the place and the thing he means to memorize.'[31]

From England, one might call on the distinguished figure of Thomas Bradwardine to provide evidence of the pervasiveness of these ideas. His *De memoria artificiali adquirenda* begins with the statement 'For a trained memory two things are necessary, that is, stable locations and also images for the material.'[32] On the one hand, his instructions would seem to disqualify landscape from providing such locations, since he says that 'Each place should be moderate in size [...] such as a little garden or the space of a small room,'[33] yet he goes on to insist that 'your backgrounds should not be made in a crowded

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[31] Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, p. 199.
[32] *Ad artificialem memoriam duo necessaria requiruntur, scilicet loca certa, ymagines quoque rerum.* (All Latin quotations from the edition by Mary Carruthers, 'Thomas Bradwardine, "*De memoria artificiale adquirenda*"', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1992), 25-43, at 35; all English translations from Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, at p. 207.)
[33] *Sit autem quantitas mediocris* [...] *ut parvum herbarium, vel area camerule.*

place,' concluding that 'images should be put into regions deserted by men and empty.'[34] Taking these criteria all together, the idea of a simple landscape feature seems perfect for Bradwardine's purposes.

Reading, the world and reading the world

Schemata such as those of Hugh of St Victor, Francesc Eliximenis and Robert of Fournival are dependent upon the image of a manufactured object, whether it be Noah's Ark, a ladder, an amphitheatre or a cultivated garden. Yet this habit of thought, this complex association of the physical world, the mental impression, and the significance, can also be thought to extend to how writers schooled in these traditions perceived landscapes and the natural (non-fabricated) world when it is represented in their writings. In a poem written early in 1877, Gerard Manley Hopkins declared that 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'.[35] As a Jesuit, almost fully trained for the priesthood at that time, Hopkins was drawing here on a long Christian tradition that saw a reflection of at least some aspects of the divine nature in the natural world. Such a tradition can be traced back to the first century AD, when St. Paul was writing to the church in Rome about those who reject God, arguing that 'that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. His eternal power also and his divinity: so that they are inexcusible.'[36] Similar ideas

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[34] *Sed ponantur in regione derelicta ab hominibus et deserta.*

[35] 'God's Grandeur' l.1, in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Selected Poetry*, ed. C. Phillips (Oxford, 1996), p. 114.

[36] Romans 1.19-20. The Vulgate has *quia quod notum est Dei manifestum est in illis Deus enim illis manifestavit invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas ut sint inexcusabiles*. Unless otherwise stated, all English quotations from the Bible are from *The Holy Bible: Douay Version* (London, 1956) and all Latin quotiations from the Bible are from *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, 5th edn (Stuttgart, 2007).

can also be found in passages of the Old Testament.[37] In the medieval period, this pervasive pedagogical function of the created world was summed up by writers such as Alan of Lille:

> Every creature in the world is like a book and a picture to us, and a mirror; a faithful representation of our life, our death, our condition, our end.[38]

One of the high points of this tradition of thought is found in the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of St. Victor, written in Paris in the late 1120s.[39] Since it is such a complex and influential exploration of the idea, from the period which was in many respects the high water mark of the tradition in the Middle Ages, I shall examine parts of this text in detail.[40]

In Book Five, chapter three, Hugh not only insists that things can be a language just as words are, but that the language of things is in many respects superior to mere words:

> It ought also to be known that in the divine utterance not only words but even things have a meaning [...] [T]he significance of things is far more excellent that that of words, because the latter was established by usage, but Nature dictated the former. The latter is the voice of men, the former the voice of God speaking to men. The latter, once uttered, perishes; the former, once created, subsists. The unsubstantial word is the sign of man's perceptions; the thing is a resemblance of the divine Idea.[41]

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[37] See for example Psalm 18.2/19.1: *caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opus manus eius adnuntiat firmamentum.* ('The heavens shew forth the glory of God; and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.')

[38] From an untitled *rhythmus*, in *PL* ccx p. 579: *Omnis mundi creatura, / Quasi liber, et pictura / Nobis est, et speculum. / Nostræ vitæ, nostræ mortis, / Nostri status, nostræ sortis / Fidele signaculum.* (English translation quoted from Minnis and Scott with David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, p. 171).

[39] *Didascalicon*, p. 3.

[40] Useful studies of the history of biblical hermeneutics in the Middle Ages can be found in James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 9-149, and of course Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952). For Hugh, see especially Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, pp. 83-106.

[41] *Didascalicon*, pp. 121-2. *Sciendum est etiam, quod in divino eloquio non tantum verba, sed etiam res significare habent* [...] *excellentior valde est rerum significatio, quam vocum; quia hanc usus instituit, illam natura dictavit. Hæc hominum vox est, illa vox Dei ad homines. Hæc*

We must not forget that Hugh is speaking specifically here of the way in which things take on meanings 'in the divine utterance', a phrase which, coming at this point in the structure of his text, can only refer to the Scriptures. Indeed, Hugh's text is often taken as an important landmark in the history of medieval Biblical study, in that it places such strong emphasis on the literal sense of the text, and the author's intention (see especially VI.iv: 'For this reason it is necessary [...] that we follow the letter in such a way as not to prefer our own sense to the divine authors').[42] If his approach to the Scriptures themselves, which he acknowledges to be a unique case and (following Augustine) capable of signifying through things as well as through words, is based on such rigorous restriction of semiotic play, surely there is no support here for the idea that landscape and other objects in non-Scriptural texts can have symbolic meaning, or would be read in such ways.

The first rejoinder to such an argument is an obvious one: that there would be no need for Hugh to advocate a particular reading approach if a different one were not already present and even prevalent. Hugh acknowledges as much, and comments on less literal reading techniques in a manner as dignified as it understated:

> For I know that a number of people do not follow this pattern in learning. But how certain of these advance, this too I am not unaware of.[43]

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prolata perit, illa creata subsistit: Vox tenuis est nota sensuum; res divinæ rationis est simulacrum. (*PL*, clxxvi 790 C.) Taylor notes that *natura* in this passage is to be understood in a sense previously established by Hugh in this work, namely 'the divine Wisdom, Second Person of the Godhead, conceived as archetypal exemplar of creation' (p. 219).

[42] *Oportet ergo ut* [...] *sic sequamur litteram, ne nostrum sensum divinis auctoribus præferamus* (*PL* clxxvi 804 D).

[43] VI.iv, p 144; *Sed quomodo quidam proficiant rursus non ignoro* (*PL* clxxvi 805 A).

Furthermore, not for the only time in the *Didascalicon* Hugh's apparent clarity in distinguishing between ways of meaning inside and outside of Scripture is in fact less than perfect. The arguments that he puts forth as to why the system of the 'significance of things' is superior to that of the 'significance of words' are, if true, necessarily just as applicable to the physical world encountered outside of the Bible as they are to verbal references to the physical world encountered within it. Finally, Hugh's comment that such speaking-by-things is 'not usually found to such an extent in other writings' (*qui modus non adeo in aliis scripturis inveniri solet*) is doubly qualified ('not usually found', *inveniri solet* and 'to such an extent', *adeo*). The habit of mind, acquired for the study of Scripture, that reads objects as meanings, is not easily left behind when reading non-Scriptural texts, nor necessarily ought it to be, as Hugh's text obliquely concedes. These other texts can, to a lesser and qualified extent, operate in ways similar to the Bible, and the same God who invests objects with meaning in the sacred text can do so in His creation as well. On Hugh's understanding, therefore, we are justified in expecting to see such an epistemological approach outside the scholarly and religious discourses of strictly Biblical exegesis.

The passage I have quoted and discussed is original to Hugh, but his thought here draws on the *De Doctrina Christiana* of St. Augustine, who once again provides the patristic fountain from which rivers of medieval literary theory flowed.[44] The most in-depth discussion of the nature of signs comes in book II of the *De Doctrina* (chapters i-vi), but much earlier on (I.ii) Augustine

broaches the difference between a thing (*res*) and a sign (*signa*), and in so doing he is explicit that *non autem omnis res etiam signum est* ('not everything is also a sign'). In the context of his argument, this point is clearly made with regard to the Bible, and is intended to guard against allegorising every *res* mentioned in it. It also becomes clear (from II.xxi-xxii) that Augustine is trying to exclude superstitious practices such as astrology. Yet as the medieval period progressed, the challenge from Classical pagan civilisation decreased, and the impulse to allegorise gained strength. By Hugh's day, there was perhaps greater emphasis on Augustine's explanation of how things could be signs than there was on his warnings about when they were not. From Augustine down to Hugh and beyond, then, the potential for things to mean more than themselves is a mainstream idea in Christian thought in the Middle Ages.

This idea is in some ways a logical concomitant to that of God as creator, who expresses his own character in his creation. This was of course highly interesting to medieval theologians, since it suggested that the physical universe was a source of potential revelation, just as the Bible was. It was another message from God himself, which needed to be interpreted properly in order to be understood. Not to do so would not only be to deprive oneself and the church of knowledge about God that He had intended they should possess, but it would also be an affront to God, a rejection of both message and Author. This theological understanding fed and was fed by a contemporary love of symbolism, and desire to collate and interlink all knowledge. This desire has been admirably described by Jerome Taylor, who identifies it as the aim of the *Didascalicon*:

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[44] Saint Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, *PL* xxxiv 15-122; English translation from Saint

> [Hugh sets out] to select and define all the areas of knowledge important to man and to demonstrate not only that these areas are essentially integrated among themselves, but that in their integrity they are necessary to man for the attainment of his human perfection and his divine destiny.[45]

From a Christian viewpoint, all knowledge (as long as it is actual rather than mistaken knowledge) is ultimately Christian knowledge, and all disciplines are facets of one Fact.

To show such a basis for the suggestive or rhetorical use of landscape within the writings of Hugh of St Victor might be no more than to highlight a special case. Yet with the exception of his emphasis on the literal sense, Minnis and Scott see him as a representative figure of the intellectual trends to the 1120s, preserving and categorising rather than blazing new trails: 'Hugh's achievement was that of the conservatively erudite and methodical teacher rather than that of the technical innovator whose thinking was far ahead of his time.'[46] His thinking is therefore powerful evidence for the understanding of reading techniques and approaches in the twelfth century (insofar as any such generalisation can ever be made), and seems to represent the intellectual mainstream of his time.

Of course, it would be misleading to suggest that there was unanimity on the consequences of these truths amongst medieval theologians. Most acknowledged that the physical world, as a language in which God spoke, was, like any language, incommensurate with Him. From this precept, two

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Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson Jr. (London, 1958).
[45] *Didascalicon*, p. 3.

approaches (broadly defined) proceeded. One was cataphatic. which used multiple images drawn from the physical world in order to suggest God to the human mind, the idea being that the nearer one came to the totality of creation as the image, the nearer one came to imagining the Creator. This understanding would clearly presents no objection to the idea advanced here that within texts things (including landscape) can mean more than themselves.

However, it might be thought that the other approach, known as apophatic (or the *via negativa*), would be antithetical to the kind of reading that I am arguing for in this thesis, since it rejected, often systematically, all images drawn from the physical world, and attempted by this process to attain to the rejection of all merely human knowledge in order to pass on to divine knowledge.[47] Both approaches, the cataphatic and apophatic, must necessarily make use of imagery, whether to accumulate it or to attempt its annihilation. This is an important point, because it must not be forgotten that even writers working in the apophatic tradition agreed that the perceptible universe was in some measure a reflection of its maker. Thus Thomas Gallus, a writer whose work repeatedly takes the form of engagement with the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus of *via negativa* theological writing, could begin his version of the *Celestial Hierarchy* (from the second quarter of the thirteenth century) with the following reflections:[48]

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[46] Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, p. 67.
[47] For a superb introduction to this subject, see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: negativity in Christian mysticism*. (Cambridge, 1995).
[48] All quotations from Gallus are from the translated extracts from his work included in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, pp. 173-92.

> Every benefit given to us in the form of natural things, and every gift which perfects nature, is from on high, coming into being from the eternal Father who begets that light which is most simple in its nature, and yet supremely manifold in the way in which it operates.[49]

By means of these gifts, God is able to give us glimpses of himself in the only way that we have the capacity to receive them:

> the divine, supreme ray cannot shine down upon us in this life unless it has been veiled with various veils consisting of sensible forms as is fit and expedient to our being raised up, and by God's providence has been made like those things which are known to us by virtue of our nature and familiarity to us.[50]

Gallus's apophaticism is based on the incommensurate nature of created and perceptible things, not an idea that they are incapable of providing any glimpse of God's nature at all.

The veiled nature of the communication afforded by objects was, moreover, not always or only perceived as an unfortunate necessity caused by the limits of human creatureliness or our fallen capacity to understand. The *via negativa* theology included the understanding that it is in the nature of a sign not only to reveal but also to conceal. To someone who understands that it is a sign, and who knows how to interpret it correctly, an image or symbol in the Bible or drawn from wider experience will act as an indicator of something beyond itself, generally a theological truth. Conversely, from someone who does not have the insight necessary to make the interpretation, or even to realise that interpretation is needed, the sign will effectively conceal the truth. In this way, signs act as a mechanism of differentiation amongst the readers of a text, ensuring that some of its content is only furnished to those who have the interpretative skill necessary

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[49] Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, p. 173.

to retrieve it. From the nature of the medieval systems of education, whereby all learning was to a greater or lesser extent theologically influenced or controlled, it follows that in the process of attaining these interpretative skills, such readers will have also have progressed far enough in Christian wisdom and teaching to be trusted with the secret teachings that are hidden in the symbols. This, then, is one instance of the ways in which texts are designed to manipulate their audiences, to self-select the responses that they will provoke.

This is all highly relevant to the argument that medieval thought saw objects in texts as signs of something beyond themselves. The apophatic theory of reading was developed with the texts of the Bible in mind, but once again there are ways in which it can be seen as applicable to secular literature.[51] Secular texts can be allusive or symbolic for the same reasons, to ensure that they reveal most to those readers best fitted to learn from them or appreciate them (whether it is humour, satire, theological reflection, bawdiness or anything else which is being held back in this way). Moreover, literary texts generally have entertainment of some kind as one of their functions, and to withhold some of what they have to say from their reader at first creates an opportunity for intellectual play. It invites a reader to re-read, to think again, to discover more in a text than at first appeared to be there. In some cases, this incompleteness of the initial revelation could be foregrounded, ensuring that the text makes no sense or only very partial sense until the symbols are interpreted correctly. Allegories can

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[50] Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, p. 174.

[51] For another example of religious ideas being applied to secular interpretation, see *Le Chevalier au Lion*, where Chrétien de Troyes appropriates the religious tradition of distinguishing between hearing with the ears and hearing with the heart, applying it to the secular tale told by Calogrenant (see Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll (Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 297).

tend towards this effect when a writer's attention or schema is directed chiefly by the tenor and his vehicle becomes contrived or nonsensical. Alternatively, a text can be perfectly comprehensible without the symbols having been understood, but once they are, they add a further level of meaning to the text. This activity can therefore be provided for in the text in order to elicit pleasure, to divert and also to stretch the mind of the reader, in a way that would not be possible if all that a text had to say were stated baldly and without requiring effort on the part of the audience. Once again, we may turn to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (II.vi) here: *et per similitudines libentius quæque cognosci, et cum aliqua difficultate quæsita multo gratius inveniri* ('things are perceived more readily through similitudes and [...] what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure'). A crossword with all the answers completed presents neither challenge nor diversion.

In the thirteenth century, there were shifts in the understanding of how the Bible and other texts ought to be read. As more of the texts of Aristotle became available in western Europe through contact with the middle eastern cultural centres where they had been preserved, scholars were eager to seize on this 'new' learning and the opportunities it afforded to re-assess what they thought they already knew. Aristotelian models opposed many of the Platonic teachings that had been woven into Christian understanding and doctrine in the west, and this had a profound effect:

> [Aristotle] caused medieval academics to reconsider long-established definitions of and methods in all the arts and sciences, and to analyse as never before their relationship with the queen of the sciences, theology.[52]

[52] Minnis and Scott *Medieval Literary Theory*, p. 197.

With regard to the study of the Bible, one of the many consequences of this revolution in learning was the shift in focus from God as divine *auctor* to the human writers of the sacred texts. If the intellectual atmosphere generated by Hugh's increased attention to the literal sense was conducive to what was in some ways a more pragmatic, less mystical approach, it was Aristotle's classification of causes that provided the mental framework and vocabulary necessary to effect it. Both God and human author were the efficient cause, God being primary and the human author secondary (in the case of a text such as the Psalms, which also had an editor arranging the individual poems in order, there could be a tertiary efficient cause, and so on as necessary).[53] Without displacing God from his position as ultimate source of authority or denying the inerrancy of Scripture, this framework allowed the human author a more distinct identity within the processes of the text, and allowed greater scholarly attention to be paid to human authorial intent. In doing so, it partly drew attention (and scholarly fashion) away from the mystical or allegorising interpretative methods favoured in the twelfth century, and epitomised in works such as Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs.

Nevertheless, this shift from the imaginative to the literal was far from complete or exclusive. In the hands of some of the thirteenth century's most brilliant writers, the re-assertion of the literal sense was not a barrier to the admission of the allegorical sense, but the very means by which that admission was possible.

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[53] See Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, especially pp. 75-84.

Perhaps the most influential example of this is found in the *Summa Theologicae* of Thomas Aquinas, 1a 1 Article 10 (Response):

> though in every branch of knowledge words have meaning, this science has this special property, that the things meant by the words also have meaning [...] That meaning, whereby the things signified by the words in turn signify other things, is called the spiritual sense, and this is based upon the literal sense and presupposes it.[54]

This passage is clearly heavily indebted to the tradition of Hugh of St Victor and Augustine, outlined above. Nor was Aquinas alone in asserting this point in the thirteenth century, for Henry of Ghent, in his *Summa quæstionum ordinarium* speaks of the knowledge conveyed by the Bible in very similar terms:

> that science speaks not in words alone like others, but speaks also by things. However, the knowledge of those things cannot be conveyed by means of what was done and undertaken, unless the knowledge of those undertakings themselves can be assumed.[55]

Aquinas and Henry speak specifically of the Bible and of biblical hermeneutics, and there may be limits to the extent that we can assume that allegorical or symbolic reading habits were transferred from the Bible to non-biblical texts. However, I believe it would be equally mistaken to assume that there was no transference of these methods across genres. The symbolic exegetic that developed throughout the early Christian era and reached a peak in the twelfth century was a habit that contemporaries of the period would surely have carried naturally across to other texts, all the more so as the literature of pagan antiquity was read allegorically, and Ovid turned into a moral exemplar. Not only would

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[54] *Et ideo cum in omnibus scientiis voces significent, hoc habet proprium ista scientia quod ipsæ res significatæ per voces etiam significant aliquid* [...] *Illa vero significatio qua res significatæ, per voces, iterum res alias significant, dicitur sensus spiritualis, qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit.* (*PL* 1* p. 470; English translation from Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, p. 240.)

[55] *Medieval Literary Theory*, p. 258.

their habits and practice have encouraged this, but the internal logic of the process itself would also suggest that this was a valid or even pious way to read texts of whatever kind, as I have tried to demonstrate in my analysis of passages from Hugh of St Victor. With the coming of the thirteenth century, theoretical models of reading changed, but not so much that the existence of an allegorical meaning, or the importance of seeking it, was denied. This is quite apart from the lag that we may presuppose existed between the application of these new methods to Biblical and scholarly texts on the one hand and vernacular texts on the other. For all these reasons, therefore, I believe that we are right to look for deeper significance in the seemingly casual or commonplace details (specifically details of landscape) to be found in the texts that I shall examine in later chapters of this study.

Chapter 2:

Landscape Archetypes

Landscape offers a multitude of ways of organising space, but the simplest divides a first area from a second, and most of the ways of doing this can be summarised under three headings. The first is elevation of one area above another, by hill or mountain; the second is depression of one area beneath another, by a valley or hollow; and the third is perhaps best called dissection of one area from another, by some such feature as a river, road or shore. Examples of all three kinds of landscape would have been more or less familiar to writers in the Middle Ages from the Bible, whether they knew them from reading it themselves or through preaching, parody and paraphrase. These landscapes from the Bible in turn helped to shape the ways in which features such as mountains, valleys and rivers could be understood and incorporated into other texts, written under its influence, whether explicit or not.

Biblical Mountains

The Biblical mountain *par excellence* was of course Sion, the mountain on which Jerusalem was built. The name appears first in 2 Samuel 5, where it is immediately glossed: *arcem Sion haec civitas David* ('the castle of Sion. The same is the city of David'). Throughout the Old Testament, Sion continues to be a metonym for Jerusalem, which is the seat not only of Israel's (and later Judah's) political power as a royal capital, but also of religious practice, the

focus of the power of God on earth.[56] For the Biblical interpreters of the Middle Ages, Jerusalem was the city of cities, and stood as a symbol for the church on earth and (drawing on Revelation 21) in heaven, not to mention the individual soul itself.

Sion was capable of invoking all of these connotations, and it is worth noting that its name is mentioned most frequently in Psalms (40 times), Isaiah (52 times) and the remaining prophets (62 in total). The prophetic mode was particularly attractive to the dominant forms of medieval exegesis, and in endlessly interpreting Sion as meaning more than Sion, the exegetes were but following where the authors of the letter to the Hebrews and Revelation had gone before.[57]

Only just second in importance to Sion is Sinai. It appears in the Old Testament with the alternative name of Mount Horeb, and under this title it is the place where Moses receives his commission from God in the burning bush, and also somewhere to which Moses returns when he is leading the Israelites across the wilderness. At a later point during Israel's wanderings, he strikes the rock to produce a spring of water for them, and it is also the scene of several encounters where God speaks directly to Moses, and through him to the Israelites. It later

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[56] See for example Psalm 9.12: *cantate Domino habitatori Sion* ('Sing ye to the Lord, who dwelleth in Sion').

[57] Hebrews 12.22: *sed accessistis ad Sion montem et civitatem Dei viventis Hierusalem caelestem et multorum milium angelorum frequentiae* ('But you are come to mount Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels'); Revelation 14.1: *et vidi et ecce agnus stabat supra montem Sion et cum illo centum quadraginta quattuor milia habentes nomen eius et nomen Patris eius scriptum in frontibus suis* ('And I beheld, and lo, a Lamb stood upon mount Sion, and with him a hundred forty-four thousand, having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads').

recurs as the place to which Elijah flees for refuge, and it is frequently referred to in Deuteronomy and once in Malachi as the place where God gave the law to Israel. In short, then, it is a place of vision, provision, and revelation.

Given these associations, it is perhaps surprising that writers of vernacular literature did not make greater use of Horeb as a location, or even mention it in passing, in the way that, as we shall see, they did with the valley of Jehoshaphat. Horeb is of course mentioned in those texts based directly on the Biblical texts where it appears, whether they be translations or paraphrases, but it has relatively little explicit impact on secular literature.

Two possible reasons for this can be inferred from the references that do exist. One of them occurs in the *Cursor Mundi*, in its paraphrase of Moses' encounter with the burning bush. It sets the scene, with Moses pastoring the flock of his father-in-law, and continues:

> Als he welk bi þam þar a-stunt,
> Bi-sid oreb, a litel munt,
> He sagh a selcuth thing to se [...] (5735-7)[58]

The punctuation here is, of course, editorial, but the phrase 'a litel munt' seems rightly interpreted as being parallel to (and expanding upon) 'oreb'. This interpretation is confirmed by comparison with a mention of Horeb in *The*

[58] This poem, extant in four MSS, was first edited by Richard Morris in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, some of his conclusions regarding the manuscript tradition were challenged by later scholars, resulting in a more recent edition of a 'Southern Version' under the general editorship of Sarah Horrall. In the absence of a critical edition of the poem based on all extant MSS, I shall refer here mainly to Horrall's edition, but Morris's edition has also been used in considering my argument here. For the best recent work on this text outside of the edition, see John J. Thompson, *The Cursor Mundi: Poem, Texts and Contexts* (Oxford, 1998).

Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun, chapter ten, as part of his description of the geography of the Holy Land:

> There is þe mont of Synay,
> The hill of Oreb neire þerby,
> Moyses [þar] þe lawis wrait
> Quhare with wes reullit þe Iowis stait. (X.875-8)[59]

In both these instances, then, Horeb is merely a 'hill' or 'little mountain', and in the second it is clearly distinguished from Sinai which is a 'mountain'. If this view of Horeb was widespread, then it would clearly not have enough physical stature in the minds of vernacular writers for it to serve as any kind of archetypal mountain. This is particularly true if, as Wyntoun's Chronicle shows, Sinai was distinguished from Horeb and thus available as an alternative model (despite being literally the same mountain) associated with many of the same events.

The second possible reason for a comparative reticence on Horeb is its negative connotations. These are not referred to in Middle English texts, but they are explicitly noted in Psalm 105.19: *fecerunt vitulum in Horeb et adoraverunt conflatile* ('They also made a calf in Horeb: and they adored the graven thing'). It is this association with the idolatrous worship of the golden calf made by Aaron that the early Tudor poet John Skelton picks up in his poem 'Speke, Parrot', where he notes that '*Vitulus* in Oreb troubled Arons brayne'(59).[60] Here, it is as an example of excess and dangerous interference, but Horeb clearly had more widely applicable negative connotations for Skelton, as he mentions it again in his long poem 'Why Come Ye Not To Court?' Skelton

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[59] Andrew Wyntoun, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun*, ed. F.J. Amours, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1903-14).

is, of course, not a poet of the period under consideration here, but it seems at least arguable that he is not being particularly innovative in these references. but drawing on associations that Horeb would have had for preceding generations.

Moreover, there are some fleeting glimpses from within the Medieval period itself that Horeb found some sort of place in the popular imagination of vernacular writers. In *The Destruction of Troy*, a Middle English poem written late in the fourteenth century or early in the fifteenth,[61] the poet casually mentions that one of those slain in battle is

> [...] Moles þe mighty, a mon out of Oreb,
> Þat to Toax, þe tore kyng, was a tru cosyn [...] (7012-13)[62]

It is, however, hard to draw firm conclusions from this passage, since it translates a mention of 'Moles de Orep' (or 'Orebs' or 'Grebs', depending upon the MS) in the source text of the poem, Guido della Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiæ*.[63] If nothing else, the English version does at least suggest some familiarity with Horeb, even if it were introduced to make sense of an incomprehensible (to the poet) original.

The name 'Sinai', whilst literally referring to the same mountain, had a subtly different set of associations. It too was linked with ideas of revelation and law-giving, but no Biblical text invoked it in connection with idol worship. In

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[60] John Skelton, *Poems*, ed. Robert S. Kinsman (Oxford, 1969), p. 79.
[61] For recent discussion of the dating of *The Destruction of Troy*, see *The Siege of Jerusalem*, eds Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, EETS OS 320 (2003), pp. xxxv-vii.
[62] *The 'Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction on Troy*, ed. George A. Panton and David Donaldson, EETS OS 39 and 56 (1869 and 1874).
[63] Guido De Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiæ*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin (Cambrdge, Mass., 1936), p. 144.

addition, an impetus to the allegorical interpretation of this landscape could be found in the New Testament itself. At Galatians 4.23-5, St. Paul interprets the two children of Abraham (Ishmael and Isaac) as standing for the products of the old and new covenants respectively:

> *sed qui de ancilla secundum carnem natus est qui autem de libera per repromissionem quae sunt per allegoriam dicta haec enim sunt duo testamenta unum quidem a monte Sina in servitutem generans quae est Agar Sina enim mons est in Arabia qui coniunctus est ei quae nunc est Hierusalem et servit cum filiis eius*[.][64]

When one adds to this the fact that in the Old Testament narratives the name was applied not only to the mountain itself, but also to the plain surrounding it (the *desertus Sinai*), it becomes clear that the Biblical account of Sinai as a concept offered a rich semantic field for writers of the medieval period to exploit, whether by name or simply in shaping perceptions of what mountains were and stood for.

Besides these specific mountains, there is a more general concept in the Old Testament of a 'high place' (*excelsum*) as a place of worship. In itself this is neither good nor bad, since both acceptable and unacceptable forms of worship can take place there. So in 2 Chronicles 1, King Solomon begins his reign by making an offering at the tabernacle, which is at that time on the 'excelsum' of Gibeon. Yet from the first appearances of the phrase (Leviticus 26.30), it carries associations of idolatry: *destruam excelsa vestra et simulacra confringam cadetis inter ruinas idolorum vestrorum et abominabitur vos anima mea* ('I will destroy

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[64] 'But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are said by an allegory. For these are the two testaments. The one from mount Sinai, engendering unto bondage, which is Agar. For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, which hath affinity to that Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.'

your high places, and break your idols. You shall fall among the ruins of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you'). Towards the end of the Old Testament, this association is strengthened, as is perhaps most vividly epitomised in Micah 1.5: *in scelere Iacob omne istud et in peccatis domus Israhel quod scelus Iacob nonne Samaria et quae excelsa Iudae nonne Hierusalem* ('For the wickedness of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the wickedness of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Juda? Are they not Jerusalem?'). In this verse, the first pair of phrases is paralleled and answered by the second. Thus *scelus* is repeated and the *scelus Iacob* is explained as being Samaria, but where one would expect a similar repetition of the *peccata domus Israhel*, there is the phrase *excelsa Iudae*. Whilst an *excelsa* could mean a citadel (because most such places were built on high ground, just as places of worship were), which Jerusalem literally was, it seems clear that here it can also be taken to mean a 'high place' in the religious sense, and that as such it is emblematic of idolatry, since it is placed (without comment) as a parallel to *peccata*.

This negative association of 'excelsum' is to some extent transformed (or perhaps one should say redeemed) in its New Testament recurrences, where it forms part of the phrases *gloria in excelsis* (Luke 19.38) and *osanna in excelsis* (Mark 11.10). Both of these phrases are found in the Ordinary of the Mass, the latter in the *Sanctus*.

Biblical Valleys

If mountains in the Bible had a double-edged significance, being associated both with encountering God and idol worship, this was to an extent

less true of valleys. Although they can have connotations of blessing, the overall impression gained from reading the Biblical texts is that they are strongly construed as places of fear, death, disappointment and idolatry. In this connection, most modern readers will think immediately of Psalm 22.4: *sed et si ambulavero in valle mortis non timebo malum quoniam tu mecum es.*[65] The *valle mortis* here does not refer to any particular literal valley, but takes that topographical feature as an appropriate symbol for the worst that can possibly befall a human being. Behind this abstraction lies a host of events, recorded in the Bible, that link real valleys with real death.

The earliest is found in Genesis 13, where Abram and Lot, having left Egypt, separate to avoid fighting between their clans. Given the choice as to which way to go, Lot chooses the valley of the river Jordan, on the basis of its appearance. This is a bad move on his part, as it will put him in contact with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, with disastrous consequences. However, although the land in question clearly is a valley, it is not named as such at this point in the Vulgate text: *elevatis itaque Loth oculis vidit omnem circa regionem Iordanis quae universa inrigabatur antequam subverteret Dominus Sodomam et Gomorram sicut paradisus Domini et sicut Aegyptus venientibus in Segor* (Genesis 13.10).[66] It is only later, when war is brewing between local kings, that we find reference to a *valle Silvestri* ('woodland vale', Gen 14.8). In Genesis 19, where the valley in which Sodom sits is destroyed by God, Lot and his family are

[65] The Douay translation is uncharacteristically distant from the Latin image here: 'For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils: for thou are with me'. The ESV is more faithful: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me' (*Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (London, 2002)).

urged to flee: *noli respicere post tergum nec stes in omni circa regione sed in monte salvum te fac ne et tu simul pereas* ('look not back, neither stay thou in all the country about: but save thyself in the mountain, lest thou be also consumed', Gen 19.17). Once again, we are told only of a *regione*, but it is worth noting that safety (invoking the discourse of fuller salvation for Christian readers of the Old Testament) is to be found *in monte*. In fact, nowhere in this account does the Vulgate refer to the location of Sodom as being a valley – it is always a *regione*. For more explicit associations of valleys and disaster, we must look elsewhere.

A complicated example is found in Deuteronomy 21, which gives instructions for the ritual cleansing of the community following an unsolved murder. The elders of the town nearest the dead body are to take a heifer that has not been yoked *et ducent eam ad vallem asperam atque saxosam quae numquam arata est nec sementem recepit et caedent in ea cervices vitulae* ('And they shall bring her into a rough and stony valley, that never was ploughed, nor sown. And there they shall strike off the head of the heifer', Deut. 21.4). The precise location of the valley here is not deemed to be important, but the use of a valley is. It is a place of sacrifice, but in the most shameful sense, a suitable place for the acknowledgment of guilt.

There are numerous passing references to valleys in the books that follow, mostly using them as boundary markers (although it is interesting to note that Delilah, Samson's nemesis, *habitabat in valle Sorech*, 'dwellt in the valley of Sorec', Judges 16.4), or places of battle (1 Samuel 17, 2 Samuel 5, 2 Samuel

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[66] 'And Lot, lifting up his eyes, saw all the country about the Jordan, which was watered

8). The picture is not entirely negative, since battle is often a praiseworthy activity in these narratives, if fought at God's command. Yet a more unequivocally sinister valley image is found in 2 Kings 23, where, as part of his religious and civil reforms, King Josiah of Judah ends the practice of child sacrifice: *contaminavit quoque Thafeth quod est in convalle filii Ennom ut nemo consecraret filium suum aut filiam per ignem Moloch* ('And he defiled Tophet, which is in the valley of the sons of Ennom: that no man should consecrate there his son or his daughter through the fire to Moloch', 2 Kings 23.10). There has been no previous mention of this valley in the Bible, but this passing reference seems to take for granted a familiarity with the location of Topheth in the valley of the sons of Hinnom as one synonymous with the very worst pagan practices. In the books of Chronicles (placed later in the canon, but telling a parallel account to the history in the books of Kings), this reference is given some background, when we learn that Ahaz, Josiah's great-great-grandfather, was one of those who took active part in the practices there: *ipse est qui adolevit incensum in valle Benennon et lustravit filios suos in igne iuxta ritum gentium quas interfecit Dominus in adventu filiorum Israhel* ('It was he that burnt incense in the valley of Benennom, and consecrated his sons in the fire, according to the manner of the nations which the Lord slew at the coming of the children of Israel', 2 Chronicles 28.3).[67] As this book reaches its climax (the fall of Jerusalem), the sin of Judah's kings intensifies, and sacrificing in the valley of Hinnom is added to the repertoire of examples used to establish the evil reputation of the worst of these rulers, as in 2 Chronicles 33.6: *transireque fecit*

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throughout, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha, as the paradise of the Lord, and like Egypt as one comes to Segor.'

[67] The name in the Vulgate text is slightly different, since in this passage the Hebrew prefix 'ben' is retained in place of the Latin *filii*, but both mean the same ('of the sons of [Ennom]').

filios suos per ignem in valle Benennon observabat somnia sectabatur auguria maleficis artibus inserviebat habebat secum magos et incantatores multaque mala operatus est coram Domino ut inritaret eum ('And he made his sons to pass through the fire in the valley of Benennom. He observed dreams, followed divinations, gave himself up to magic arts, had with him magicians and enchanters: and he wrought many evils before the Lord, to provoke him to anger'). In its nature, and in its positioning, coming as it does just at the point when God will finally lose patience with Judah, as it were, there could hardly be a more damning association for a valley to carry.

It is in this context that the prophet Jeremiah speaks repeatedly of the same place. In Jeremiah 7, God recalls these sacrifices and pronounces the judgement that he will mete out for them: *ideo ecce dies venient dicit Dominus et non dicetur amplius Thofeth et vallis filii Ennom sed vallis Interfectionis et sepelient in Thofeth eo quod non sit locus* ('Therefore, behold, the days shall come, saith the Lor, and it shall no more be called Topheth, nor the valley of the son of Ennom: but the valley of slaughter. And they shall bury in Topheth, because there is no place', 7.32). At chapter 19, Jeremiah is commanded to deliver this message in Topheth itself, with added material detailing the destruction to come: *et dissipabo consilium Iudae et Hierusalem in loco isto et subvertam eos gladio in conspectu inimicorum suorum et in manu quaerentium animas eorum et dabo cadavera eorum escam volatilibus caeli et bestiis terrae* ('And I will defeat the counsel of Juda and of Jerusalem in this place: and I will destroy them with the sword in the sight of their enemies and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and I will give their carcasses to be meat for the fowls

of the air and for the beasts of the earth'. 19.7). The sins committed in the valley of Hinnom are mentioned again in chapter 26, and this recurrence of the theme, in very similar wording, gives this particular landscape, vividly imagined, a strong prominence through the book.

It is all the more surprising, then, that this powerful image does not seem to have appealed directly to the vernacular writers in our period, although it cannot but have contributed to the negative associations of valleys in the middle ages. In contrast, the valley of Jehoshaphat, similarly a valley of judgement, is remarkably current in the vernacular literature. It is mentioned in the third chapter of the book of the prophet Joel in the Old Testament:

> *congregabo omnes gentes et deducam eas in valle Iosaphat et disceptabo cum eis ibi super populo meo et hereditate mea Israhel* [...] *consurgant et ascendant gentes in vallem Iosaphat quia ibi sedebo ut iudicem omnes gentes in circuitu* [...] *populi populi in valle concisionis quia iuxta est dies Domini in valle concisionis*[.] (3.2, 3.12, 3.14)[68]

The passage of this book to receive most comment from Patristic and medieval writers was the closing verses of chapter 2 ('And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people [etc.]'), which the New Testament writers saw as prophesying the events of Pentecost (Acts 2.14-21). Writers in our period concurred in this, but devoted less attention to the vision in the following chapter. This, however, was not ignored entirely, and Jerome stood at the head of a long interpretative tradition associated with Joel 3. He mentions it several times, declaring for example in the commentary on Jeremiah that the valley was

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[68] 'I will gather together all nations and bring them down into the valley of Josaphat: and I will plead with them there for my people and for my inheritance Israel [...] let them arise and let the nations come up into the valley of Josaphat: for there I will sit to judge the nations round about [...] Nations, nations in the valley of destruction: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of destruction.'

also the location of Gethsemane and therefore of the betrayal of Christ by Judas. In his commentary on the passage from Joel, he concentrated (unsurprisingly) on issues that he had encountered in translation, and in doing so he gave two possible interpretations of the name of this valley. The first linked it to the Judean King of the same name, who ruled in the 9th century BC (2 Chronicles 17-21). The second interpretation was based on the etymology of the name, which literally means 'Yahweh judges'. This was also the interpretation that he had given in the commentary on Ezekiel and in his letters (Ep. 18a), where he stresses the important symbolism that sinners will see God not sitting on his throne but 'in the valley of Jehoshaphat, not on a hill, not on a mountain, but in a valley and in the valley of judgment' (my translation).[69] Other patristic writers, such as Iulianus Aeclanensis,[70] Facundus Hermianensis,[71] Iulianus Toletanus,[72] also commented on this passage, but their comments generally add little to Jerome.[73]

Outside of the patristic Biblical commentaries, however, there were other popular traditions which were passed on to the later Middle Ages concerning the valley of Jehoshaphat. As the legend of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary emerged in the first centuries of the Christian era, three locations became associated with the event. In the Greek and Syriac traditions, these locations were the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Valley of

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[69] *in ualle iosaphat, non in colle, non in monte, sed in ualle et in ualle iudicii.*
[70] See *Tractatus prophetarum Osee, Iohel et Amos*, chapter 3.
[71] See *Ep. fidei catholicae in defensione trium capitulorum*, chapter 22.
[72] See *Prognosticorum futuræ sæculi libri tres*, III.ii
[73] This can be readily established by using the CETEDOC Library of Christian Latin Texts CD-ROM, and running a few simple *inquisitiones* on *Iosaphat* in its various declined forms.

Jehoshaphat.[74] In the Coptic traditions, the location is always Jehoshaphat (p. 46). As Mary Clayton points out, 'All three places are in fact in close proximity to each other: the Mount of Olives is the highest hill in the east of Jerusalem, separated from the city by the valley of Jehoshaphat, and the Garden of Gethsemane is near its foot' (p. 26).[75] From the end of the sixth century onwards, the valley had gained primacy amongst these three putative locations for the Virgin's burial and Assumption (p. 96).

This seems to have been the location that passed into Old and Middle English literature, as seen in an eleventh century English manuscript which contains a Latin text referring to *ualle Iosaphath* as Mary's burial place. Two earlier accounts, in homilies written in Old English, also seem to choose Jehoshaphat as the burial site. In one, from Cambridge Corpus Christ College MS 41, Peter is commanded to bury Mary 'in þa swiðran healfe þære ceastre [sc. Jerusalem] to eastdale' (p. 222). In the other, the command takes a slightly different form: 'Đys mærgenhian dæge heo bið gangende on ðisse ceastre on ða swidran healfe mines dæles' (p. 258). It is tempting to interpret the second of these, as Zupitza has done, as being a corruption of the first (p. 295). On this reading, the instruction was originally to bury Mary in the valley on the east of the city (that is, the valley of Jehoshaphat), but this was later corrupted through confusion between 'dæl = valley' and 'dæl = portion' to become 'the right-hand half of my portion' ('swiðran healfe mines dæles'), portion being a common Biblical way for God to refer to his chosen land, people or city. However, Clayton is more cautious, and it should be noted that in his dictionary Clark-Hall

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[74] See Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge,

takes the second component of the compound 'eastdæl' as being 'dæl = portion', the whole word meaning 'eastern quarter, the East'.[76] The references he cites for this meaning are taken from the works of Ælfric and Alfred, rather than from this ambiguous homily. It is therefore possible that the homily in CCCC 41 (and/or its source) never meant a specific reference to the valley but merely the eastern side of Jerusalem, which could refer to any of the three locations.

Nevertheless, later texts in Middle English confirm the association of Jehoshaphat with the Assumption. The poem known to modern scholars as 'The Assumption of our Lady' exists in two MSS, both of which place her burial in this valley.[77] The association is imaginatively expressed in York Play XLV (The Weavers), where Thomas, in turmoil after Christ's death, speaks as he wanders and sets the scene for his audience by declaring 'Þis is þe Vale of Josophat in Jury so gente'.[78] This may suggest that the Weavers could expect their audience to have some familiarity with the association of this place with the Assumption, so that this line functions to heighten anticipation of what is to come (the audience would presumably already have some expectation of an Assumption in the play by virtue of its place in the order of the cycle being presented). He then has a vision of angels taking Mary to heaven, which is not only intended to parallel the resurrection appearance of Christ to Thomas in its rejuvenating effect

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1998), p. 26. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[75] The valley of Jehoshaphat is therefore identical with the Kidron valley.

[76] J.R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (4th edn., reprinted Toronto, 2002), s.v. 'eastdæl'.

[77] The poem is edited in *King Horn, Floriz and Blaunchefloure, The Assumption of our Lady*, ed. G.H. McKnight, EETS OS 14 (1901). The Add. MS mentions 'Iosephat' in line 590, and MS C refers to 'Iosaphath' in line 472 and 'Iosephas' in line 581.

[78] *The York Plays*, ed. R. Beadle (London, 1982), XLV, l. 97.

on his faith, but also draws on the dream-vision genre of Middle English poetry by having Thomas lie down on a 'banke' before he has his vision.

If then the association of this valley with the Assumption was well established in Middle English literature, its status as a place of judgement, which is its function in the book of Joel, was even more firmly fixed in the minds of many writers in our period. This occurs late in the period in Thomas Brampton's *Penitential Psalms*.[79] In this work, each verse of the Vulgate's penitential psalms (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142) is followed by eight lines of English verse which paraphrase and comment on the Latin text. In the fourteenth stanza, the verse 'Discedite a me omnes qui operamini iniquitatem: quoniam exaudiuit Dominus vocem fletus mei' is followed by Brampton's comment:

> Whan þ*u* schalt deme bothe great and smale
> That day nedis we most abide
> From Iosophat þ*t* dredfull vale
> Ther is no man þat may hym hide (p. 373)

This is a classic statement of personal response to the threat that Joel 3 makes to all individuals, and here 'Iosophat þdredfull vale' is openly emblematic of final judgement, since some such understanding is necessary on the part of the reader in order to make sense of the connection between the first two lines and what follows. It is noticeable also that in the remaining four lines of the stanza, which as in the other stanzas constitute a direct appeal to God, Brampton goes on to a further spatial metaphor, perhaps drawn from the parable of judgement in Matthew 25, asking 'set me lord on thy Right side'.

Perhaps the most extended treatment of the idea from Joel is found in the *Cursor Mundi*. It provides a paraphrase of God's words from Joel 3.2:

> In vale of Iosephat I shalle
> Do to be gedered ledes alle
> Þere shal I Yyve my doom of drede [...][80]

In one MS, the final section of *Cursor Mundi* text is missing, replaced by a long section from a poem called *The Pricke of Conscience*. In these lines, which in some respects closely mirror the *Cursor Mundi*, reference is made once again to the legend of the Assumption:

> Þe vale of Iosaphat vndir be
> Where beried was our lady mary (5192-3)[81]

The poet of *The Pricke of Conscience* seems at first to interpret the passage from Joel fairly literally, yet he does imagine 'Iosaphat' as a suitable place for all the people of the world to gather for judgement, something for which the real valley, indeed any valley, would presumably be too small. This must have a bearing on our explanation of his curious statement that 'Þat vale þe vale of erþ is called' (5167). I can find no direct source for such a name being applied to Jehoshaphat, but it is possible that by 'vale of erþ' the poet means not a vale made of earth, but the vale as location for judgement of the whole earth. A different, but obviously

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[79] James R. Kreutzer, 'Thomas Brampton's Metrical Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms: A Diplomatic Edition of the Version in MS Pepys 1584 and MS Cambridge University FF 2.38 with Variant Readings from All Known Manuscripts', *Traditio* 7 (1949), 359-403.
[80] *The Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi: Vol. V*, ed. L.M. Eldredge and A.M. Klinck (Ottowa, 2000), 22969-71. Subsequent quotations from this volume will be given by line numbers in the text itself.
[81] The relevant portion of *The Pricke of Conscience* is printed in Eldredge and Klinck, *Southern Version of the Cursor Mundi*. Quotations are from this edition.

closely related explanation, would place 'vale of erþ' in the context of similar phrases elsewhere in Middle English that refer to the whole of mortal experience in the present world, usually as a place of trial and tribulation. Ultimate judgement from God could easily be construed as the *ne plus ultra* of this topos here.

The *Pricke of Conscience* poet then goes on to state that 'He [sc. God] scall sitt aboue þe vale namly / Þat men þe vale of Iosaphat callis' (5224-5). The physical positioning of God in relation to this judgement was evidently something of a sensitive issue for the poet of the *Cursor Mundi*. He is concerned to reconcile the verses from Joel 3 with the statement in 1 Thessalonians 4.17 about *nos qui vivimus* meeting God *in aera*. Whereas in *The Pricke of Conscience* the poet may have felt that God's physical position over the valley makes sense of both verses, for the poet of the *Cursor Mundi* this is an indicator that the valley of Jehoshaphat in Joel is intended to be read metaphorically. He explicitly condemns those who hold to the literal meaning and, citing Jerome by name, asserts that the latter's etymological interpretation of the name is the correct one. Here at least there is direct evidence of the continuing influence of Jerome's comments on this passage on later medieval English writers. In all three of these poems, then, we see evidence that the poets were used to thinking of this location in imaginative ways, and that it stimulated them creatively to draw out implications of the Biblical message.

This can be seen further in the references to the valley of Jehoshaphat that can be found in some of the longer medieval verse romances. It is perhaps not

surprising that it should be used as one of the locations in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, as the valley's location on the outskirts of the city would not have been an unusual piece of knowledge on the part of the poet. He refers to it as

Of Iosaphat þer Ihesu schal iuggen all þinges [...] þe vale (430-1)[82]

This reference is interesting not only because it demonstrates a familiarity (even an indirect one) on the part of the poet with this portion of the Bible, but also because there is a suggestion that this knowledge is used to lend a further dimension to the narrative of the poem itself. The valley is mentioned because a huge battle is about to take place there between the Christian and the pagan armies. By setting this battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat, the poet is not only using geographical detail to enhance the verisimilitude of his poem, but also suggesting that the war he describes is a type or shadow of the greater ultimate opposition of the godly and ungodly which has been prophesied to take place in the same location. This would be implied by the mere mention of the name itself, but coupled with the gloss 'þer Ihesu schal iuggen alle þinges' the connection gains a great deal in force.

The valley is mentioned again in the long Scots poem *The Buik of Alexander*.[83] Here it is once again the scene of a battle (lines 2153ff.), but there is also a more puzzling reference in the early stages of the poem. Alexander is besieging the city of Tyre, a port on the coast to the north of Jerusalem. Running short of supplies, he calls one of his knights to him and issues instructions:

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[82] *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. R. Hanna and D. Lawton, EETS OS 320 (2003).
[83] *The Buik of Alexander: vol. 1*, ed. R.L. Graeme Ritchie (Edinburgh, 1925).

He bad him seuin hundreth knychtis ta,
And with thame in to forray ga
Richt to the vale of Iosephas
That of mair stoir aboundand was,
as of sheip, oxin and of ky,
Than ony vther land thairby. (31-6)

Once again, I have not been able to trace a source for this suggestion that the valley of Jehoshaphat was a place of abundant provisions and livestock. One possibility is that the idea of a valley is enough in itself to suggest abundance, or that the valley of Jehoshaphat has become confused with the valley chosen by Lot in Genesis 13 for its apparent abundance.[84] It would certainly be appropriate for that valley (the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, consumed by fire as a judgement from God) to become confused or identified with the valley of Jehoshaphat, but I have not been able to find any more definite instances of this taking place. Alternatively, it is possible that in the lines from *The Buik of Alexander* some association is being made between the sheep, oxen and cows as sacrificial animals and the imagery of slaughter in parts of Joel 3 (such as verses 9 and 10: *clamate hoc in gentibus sanctificate bellum suscitate robustos accedant ascendant omnes viri bellatores concidite aratra vestra in gladios et ligones vestros in lanceas*, 'Proclaim ye this among the nations: prepare war, rouse up the strong: let them come, let all the men of war come up. Cut your ploughshares into swords and your spades into spears'). If this is too tenuous a connection, it may simply be that the poet uses the prospect of abundant food in the valley as a device to help move the narrative to Jehoshaphat. Once this has been accomplished, it makes it possible for the poet to use the valley as a scene for battle later on in the poem, for the same reasons encountered in *The Siege of*

Jerusalem, namely that the battle he will describe foreshadows the impending judgement of God. If so, this is further evidence of the powerful effect that a landscape briefly mentioned in one book of the Bible could have on the medieval poetic imagination.

Tradition identifies the valley of Jehosaphat with the Kidron valley, to the east of Jerusalem. The Kidron valley King David crossed when he was forced to flee his capital under threat from his son Absolom, and in later generations, reforming kings such as Asa and Josiah used the valley as a place in which to burn the relics of idol worship. However, a verse in Jeremiah gives reason to hope that Kidron will be transformed: *et omnem vallem cadaverum et cineris et universam regionem mortis usque ad torrentem Cedron et usque ad angulum portae Equorum orientalis sanctum Domini non evelletur et non destruetur ultra in perpetuum* ('And the whole valley of dead bodies and of ashes, and all the country of death, even to the torrent Cedron and to the corner of the horse-gate towards the east, the Holy of the Lord. It shall not be plucked up and it shall not be destroyed any more for ever.' Jeremiah 31.40)

All of these valleys (Kidron, Jehoshaphat, Tophet) are found on the outskirts of Jerusalem. In fact, they are the geographical depressions that abut the mountains (chiefly Sion) on which the city itself stands. As such, they provided an excellent contrast for typological interpreters of height (physical, moral, spiritual) being found in extremely close proximity to depth.

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[84] For this suggestion, I am indebted to Dr. Ad Putter.

One final Biblical valley demands comment, since it is crucial to Christian (and therefore medieval) conceptions of the afterlife. In the Old Testament, conceptions of what happens to the soul after death are not rigorously defined. Some people, notably kings of Judah, are said to sleep with their fathers on dying (e.g. 2 Kings 14.22), and there are the exceptional cases of Elijah (who is taken up to heaven directly, 2 Kings 2) and possibly Enoch, of whom we are told in Genesis 5.24 *ambulavitque cum Deo et non apparuit quia tulit eum Deus* ('And he walked with God and was seen no more because God took him'). Yet the most common way for the Old Testament to refer to the world of the dead is by use of the Hebrew word 'Sheol', which occurs 63 times. In the Hebrew text, this is a shadowy concept, but certainly not a place that anyone would wish to go to. It is a place where no-one can praise God (Psalm 6.6), a place where the wicked go (Job 24.19). In the Vulgate, 'Sheol' is translated either as *infernum* or *inferos* (those below, i.e. the dead).[85] This hides the distinction between Old and New testament terms, but it does re-inforce an association between death, punishment, and low position.

The New Testament, in its Greek and especially its Vulgate forms, brings these into much sharper focus. In some cases, the Vulgate carries over the same vocabulary used to translate 'Sheol' in the Old Testament. In Luke 16.22, the parable of Dives and Lazarus places the former *in inferno*; in Matthew 11.23 (and the parallel passage in Luke 10.15) 'Hades' in the Greek text is rendered by *infernum*, and the same thing happens again in Acts 2.27, Acts 2.31, and

[85] The two words *infernus* and *infer* are clearly closely related etymologically, and ripe for confusion, especially since in the dative or ablative forms *inferno infero* (in which they often appear) they are differentiated by only a single letter. This confusion is documented in several

Revelation 1.18. *Infernum* is also found in Luke 16.22. The gates in Matthew 16.18 are *inferi* ('of below'), and *inferus* ('the dead') appear in Revelation 6.8, 20.13 and 20.14. In 2 Peter 2.4, the the ropes (*rudentis*) with which the sinning angels are pulled away are said to be *inferni*, infernal, of hell. The place to which they are drawn and handed over, is *tartarum* (translating the Greek 'Hades'), the only occurrence of this word in the Vulgate and a reference that highlights the conceptual debt which it owes to ancient Greek and Roman ideas about the afterlife. All of these instances continue the association, already to be found in Classical mythology, of hell with lowness, but the remaining references in the New Testament to a place of punishment after death make a much more concrete connection between the two.

Most of the New Testament references to a place of punishment after death come from Christ himself in the gospels. The word that he uses most often for such a place is 'gehenna', a Greek word which the Vulgate preserves (as a first declension feminine noun). This refers back to the valley of Hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which by the time of Christ had become a refuse tip for the city, continually aflame to destroy the rubbish. This, combined with its previous history (described above), made it an appropriate emblem for eternal punishment, one that would be well-known to a contemporary audience in Jerusalem.

Biblical Rivers

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cases: see the textual notes to Matthew 16.18, Revelation 6.8, and Revelation 20.13 and 20.14 in the *Biblia Sacra*.

Unlike mountains or valleys, rivers are present in the Biblical narrative from the very first chapters. The river in Eden, which split into four others (Gihon, Cush, Tigris and Euphrates), was a ripe source of allegory in the Middle Ages. The Nile is important as the river from which Moses was drawn, and which later became the object of one of the ten plagues on Egypt, but also as an emblem for the economic power of Egypt as a rival (and ungodly) power alongside Israel.

More important to the landscape of the Bible, however, is the Jordan. As mentioned above, it is the region that Lot chooses when separating from Abraham, and as such it is lush, enticing, but ultimately unsafe, morally and physically. Subsequently, the Jordan recurs as a landmark and reference point, specifically important as a border or barrier to be crossed. Most significantly, of course, it is the border of the Promised Land, which had to be crossed in order for the Israelite armies to invade Canaan. This crossing is effected by the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant into the river, at which God causes the waters to stop so that the whole of Israel can cross on dry land (Joshua 3.14-16).

This episode was seen as important by medieval exegetes not only for its historical truth but also in allegorical terms. The entry into the earthly promised land was seen as a precursor of the entry (individual and corporate) into heaven. In this interpretation, the river Jordan represents the barrier that must be gone through in order to reach heaven, that is, death.

Doubtless, this connection between a river and death would have been strengthened in the minds of medieval scholars trained in the Roman Classics, who knew of the Styx, but it also received reinforcement from specifically Christian ideas. The Jordan re-appears in the New Testament in connection with John the Baptist, and it is in this river that those who come to him (including Christ) are baptised. Baptism is a symbolic death, as St. Paul explains in Romans 6.2-3:

> *absit qui enim mortui sumus peccato quomodo adhuc vivemus in illo*
> *an ignoratis quia quicumque baptizati sumus in Christo Iesu in morte ipsius baptizati sumus*
> *consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem ut quomodo surrexit Christus a mortuis per gloriam Patris ita et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus*[.][86]

To be baptised is to go through death in advance, so that when physical death arrives the soul may survive it. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the *locus classicus* for baptism in the New Testament should also be the place allegorised from the Old Testament as death itself.

The association of rivers with death is therefore a complex one, since baptism as death is obviously a source not of mourning but of rejoicing from a Christian point of view. The positive connotations of rivers are capped by a passage almost at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation 22.1-2, where St. John is being led through the new heaven:

> *et ostendit mihi fluvium aquae vitae splendidum tamquam cristallum procedentem de sede Dei et agni in medio plateae eius*[.][87]

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[86] 'God forbid! For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Know you not that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism into death; that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.'

Here the promise of the 'water of life' given by Christ in John 4.14 and again in John 7.37-8 is shown as fulfilled, and taking the form of a river. This time, however, the river acts not as barrier or division (there is no need for either in heaven, and the tree of life is specifically said to be growing on either side of it), but as centrepiece.

Classical landscapes

The Bible was of course the dominant text in shaping the culture of the Middle Ages, but it was by no means the only one that contributed to the understanding of written landscapes in the period. Non-Christian texts from the Classical period were read, studied and respected almost as intently and reverently as the Bible, and some of these in particular had a powerful effect in shaping medieval imaginations of written landscape. We have already seen the ways in which theories of memory organisation attributed to Cicero were fundamental in developing techniques of thought in the monastic practice. Other texts contributed particular pieces of mental topography, like those from the Bible discussed above, and it is to these that we must finally turn before studying the medieval texts themselves in the following chapters.

When Chaucer, in the closing stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde* bids his 'bok' 'subgit be to alle poesye' (V.1786, 90), the poets he mentions specifically are 'Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace' (V.1792). For many medieval writers, including Chaucer, these five epic poets bulked large in conceptions of

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[87] 'And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God

what poetry ought to be like, the standard to which all other writing (including their own) ought to aspire.[88] Texts such as the *Aeneid*, *Metamorphoses*, *Thebaid* and *Pharsalia* provided a large part of the basis from which were derived models for medieval poetic composition. In part this was possible because there was a strong line of continuity between them, a result of the fact that their poets had sought to emulate each other. Just as Virgil had cast his epic as a deliberate imitation and appropriation of the works of Homer, so Ovid wrote under the influence of both, Lucan aligned his own poem in relation to all three, and Statius wrote in conscious continuation of the same tradition. This meant that, in spite of the differences between these epicists (Virgil's nationalism, Ovid's compendiary form, Lucan's concern with politics rather than the gods, Statius' somewhat torrid style), they could still be viewed as forming a coherent tradition.[89]

At first glance, however, there would not appear to be much here for the student of landscape to trace, from the Classical epics to the writings of the Middle Ages. Catalogues of place names are notable characteristics of Homeric epic, most famously in the list of those fighting on the Greek side at Troy in book II of the Iliad. However, such catalogues in themselves seem to have offered little to the medieval imagination. Certainly no placename from these catalogues

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and of the Lamb in the midst of the street thereof'.

[88] The ability to read Greek was an extremely rare accomplishment in Western and Central Europe during the Middle Ages, but Latin translations of Homer's works were available. Chaucer's use of the name here testifies to the former's reputation in the period, and his place in the curriculum is attested by his inclusion (not without criticism) in the lists of authors that were used as part of the teaching process. Examples can be found in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory*, pp. 16-17 (an anonymous *accessus ad auctores*) and p. 60 (from the *Dialogue on the Authors* by Conrad of Hirsau).

[89] For a brief but illuminating exposition of the different characters of these classical poets, see the introductory article by E.J. Kenney in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford, 1986).

can be traced through medieval literary texts in the same way that one can do for Jehoshaphat.

This is hardly surprising. The lists provide only names, along with more or less brief genealogical information. Topographical details are rarely included, but even if they were, these lists would have little to offer the present study. Simply to list names of places is not enough to embed them in the imagination. Without a strong and detailed association with important events, a landscape has no character that can be re-used or which can spark off further creative processes. They remain mere words, effective as details in creating the depth of history that the poet wants for his poem, but there is nothing to distinguish one place from another, except the names and characters of the people who ruled them. These people, however, are in turn often little distinguished from one another, and even when the individuals became fixed in the mind of later ages, it was they and not their kingdoms that recurred and became part of the imaginative vocabulary of the Middle Ages.

There was nevertheless one location that was the supreme gift of the classical era to the Middle Ages: Troy. The influence of the myths centred around that city and the Trojan war was pervasive. The list of works that drew inspiration from Troy would have to include not only Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, Guido della Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, Boccacio's *Il Filostrato*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Lydgate's *Troy Book*, Henryson's *Testament of Cressid*, and the *Roman d'Eneas*, but also Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and all subsequent works (such as *Sir*

Gawain and the Green Knight) that repeated its assertion that the British are (like the ancient Romans) descended from a Trojan. There can be no doubt that Troy was one of the patterning narratives of medieval imagination.

Yet Troy was not so much a place as a narrative, or a nexus of narratives. Whereas a Biblical landscape such as the vale of Jehoshaphat had a clear symbolic meaning (judgement) that could usefully and subtly be drawn in to a variety of circumstances in different kinds of literature, a reference to Troy worked in a different way, not because it meant too little but because it meant too much. To talk of Troy was, at one stage in the medieval development of the legend, to talk of war, but it might be unclear whether the war was a good or bad thing, a victory or defeat, since neither Greeks nor Trojans could be presumed as the audience's 'side' in the same way that God could. Although the influence of Virgil meant that the Trojans were the more likely to be seen as the virtuous side, the testimonies of Dares and Dictys, both believed in the Middle Ages to be eye-witness accounts, were balanced against one another, de-stabilising any assumptions as to the army that an audience would be likely to favour. If the passage of time meant that sympathies lay increasingly with the Trojans, this was accompanied by a process in which Troy no longer meant war, or only war, but also (thanks to Boccaccio and then Chaucer) love. The war in *Troilus and Criseyde* provides the framework for the plot and many of the engines for its advancement, but not the subject or purpose of the poem. This over-determination of Troy as a signifier makes it a somewhat uncontrollable symbolical tool, except where the context makes clear for what purposes the reference or setting is used.

Troy as landscape did, however, have one strong impact on medieval thinking, and not only thinking but also politics and propaganda. I have already alluded to works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where a national mythic past is traced back to the flight from Troy. This phenomenon was by no means limited to England. As Sylvia Federico notes 'Scores of European states and their rulers claimed Trojan precedent in efforts to achieve, consolidate and maintain their power in relation to other states and often in relation to their own fractious constituencies.'[90] Troy was a means of evoking past glories, not only cultural[91] but also (surprisingly for a state most famous for losing a war) military-political. Federico points out that 'curiously, it was Troy and not Rome that signified "imperial" for English and French authors alike in the later Middle Ages.'[92] Federico is probably wrong to suggest that Troy supplanted Rome in this role (the rivalry between England and Rome is still alive in the Arthurian tradition of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as witness the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*), but right to point out that by this point Troy and Rome were both imperial archetypes.

In the English context, there was a specific landscape dimension to this conceit, or fantasy, or claim. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* introduced the idea that London was originally founded by Brutus as New Troy (the name, says Geoffrey, becoming corrupted over time into

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[90] Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2003), p. xii.

[91] Under the influence of Virgil, medieval narratives of Troy often suggest that the Trojans, although losing the war, were more cultured and moral than the Greeks, as a comparison of Chaucer's Troilus with his Diomede makes clear (all references to the works of Chaucer are to Larry D. Benson et al., eds, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford, 1988).

Trinovantum). This idea, although popular, awaited full elaboration in the vernacular in the closing decades of the fourteenth century, and into the fifteenth, a boom period for Troy texts in England. It is no coincidence that this was a period of unrest and intense political contest for the English ruling classes, at home and abroad. There was the ongoing war with France; resulting tension between the crown and the nobles who bankrolled the military campaigns; concern at the accession in 1377 of a boy-king under a Protectorship; the Peasant's Revolt n 1381; Bolingbroke's seizure of the throne in 1399; and the opening moves of the Wars of the Roses in the mid-fifteenth century. In the midst of these uncertainties, links with Troy could provide certainty by way of links with the past, legitimising regimes or claims to power. In a context of interminable military activity that produced both partial victories and partial defeats, Troy could provide a model of glorious warfare. Most importantly for the current study, in contrast to a society in danger of fragmenting or sinking into internecine broils, Troy was a picture of a noble cultured society, only ever defeated in order to give birth to something new and equally great.

To proclaim London as New Troy was therefore unquestionably a gesture of aggrandisement, declaring the contemporary city worthy not just as inheritor or descendent but reincarnation of all that was best in the revered golden age of the past. At the same time, the name of Troy had other associations that could not entirely be suppressed when invoking it: 'The Trojans were considered a noble society, but they also were considered lecherous and traitorous; their ultimate defeat was but the natural result of their unnatural desires [...] What

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[92] Federico, *New Troy*, p. xv.

Troy meant for London was split between prophesied glory of empire and doomed destruction by treason and lust.'[93] In one sense, then, the idea of Troy carried a large range of significations, making it a potent if dangerous tool in rhetorical writing (whether literary or historical). If it was an important weapon to have on one's side in political battle, then the course of that battle could also turn Troy against one too. This combination of power and polysemy meant that Troy was an enormous presence in the late medieval imagination.

There are, however, limits to this presence. 'Troy' itself passed into the common currency of mental landscapes, but the details of the city and its surrounding area were less widely taken up for use by medieval writers. Chaucer is a notable exception to this, as he mentions a Gate of Dardanus, and Simois memorably also appears in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Indeed, Chaucer gives a strong sense of place throughout that poem, yet he is the exception rather than the rule. Names such as 'Simois' and 'Scamander' did not have the same imaginative resonance as 'Troy' itself: Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for example, is rich in stories that either take place in or allude to Troy, yet that poem never mentions either river. Troy is thus highly influential in generating imaginative re-interpretations, but in a different way from the Biblical archetypes discussed above.

Federico looks at the 'New Troy' phenomenon from a Freudian perspective, I from a more traditional literary-historical one, yet I believe she is

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[93] Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 2-3.

right to say that Troy was 'always only a place-name and never a place'.[94] By this, she means that the Troy of the Middle Ages hovers between history and fiction, finally residing only in the imagination. For my purposes, Federico's phrase is equally accurate in describing the way in which Troy acted on the imagination, always as an idea and almost never as a landscape. Yes Troy was known to be on the edge of Europe; yes it was known to be a walled city; and yes the local landscape features such as Ida and Simois are known in the medieval tradition; but none of these things strongly characterised the understanding or use of Troy in the period. London is New Troy because of its imperial power or moral degeneration, not because it has a river running through it. Troy is more concrete and did not offer a physical landscape that could be manipulated as Horeb, Jordan or Gehenna could. Its impact on the thought patterns and habits that I am attempting to discover in this study is therefore less than might be imagined.

What, therefore, is the relation between the material presented so far and the landscapes I shall examine in the pages to follow? In the following chapters, I will make reference to certain of the landscapes that I have been discussing here, trying to show some of the ways in which their influence may be felt in a wide variety of texts, religious or secular, Latin or vernacular, literary, doctrinal or pseudo-historical. In doing so, I am not exactly seeking to establish either sources or analogues. I do not believe, nor have I found any evidence to suggest, that in writing the texts I shall examine the medieval authors were either incapable of creating imaginary landscapes of their own, or felt obliged to add

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[94] Federico, *New Troy*, p. 3.

authority to what they wrote by setting it in a landscape borrowed from an authoritative text. (That *some* of the authors may have *chosen* such landscapes in order to confer authority on their writing, or make it otherwise interact with the earlier text, is an entirely different proposition from saying that *all* my authors felt *bound* to do so.) The sort of influence I am seeking to trace is less definite, more elusive, and it must be admitted more conjectural than such *Quellenforschung*. Direct lines of descent and explicit borrowings are the exception rather than the rule here. Rather, I am seeking to see the worlds created in the texts I study through the paradigms that were widespread among the intellectual and literate classes that produced them. Specifically, I want to suggest that an intensely bookish outlook and a thorough acquaintance with the narratives of the Bible and of certain texts from the Classical and early Christian eras shaped the ways in which my authors (and others) viewed landscape. It is not that their indebtedness to these merging traditions prevented them from creating new mental landscapes, but rather that it provided the very basis from which they could do so, and therefore shaped the terms in which they would tend to think of the scenes and places they invented.

It is in this light that I would like to place the contents of this chapter. The mnemonic techniques and reading methods that I have sketched out in the previous chapter are included as evidence of the ways in which scholars and writers were used to thinking and dealing with space in the texts they used and made. I have tried to argue that such mental tools could be applied with minimal adjustment to both the reading and the writing of texts outside the Bible and the Latin Classics, and suggested that it is likely that this happened to some extent,

whether deliberately or through habit. On this basis it is my contention that it will be fruitful for readers coming to these texts after a gap of several centuries to apply such techniques to their reading.

Secondly, I have rehearsed some of the most important landscape ideas that were bequeathed to the Middle Ages by their governing texts, principally the Bible but also the poetry of Virgil, Ovid, Statius and Lucan amongst others. Again, insofar as space permits I have tried to show the ways in which these landscapes shaped imaginations in a variety of ways in my period. My aim here has been to provide evidence of the active penetration of ideas about landscape or place derived from the governing texts into the writing of texts that in many ways might be thought to have little to do with them in terms of subject matter. It is my further contention that in addition to these explicit verbal connections, there are more subtle influences at work. With all due allowance being made for the distinction of genres, and the separation between edificatory or dogmatic reading on the one hand and pure entertainment literature (if such a thing can be said to exist in the medieval period) on the other, I submit that it is a *prima facie* improbability that people whose minds were schooled in interpreting these model landscapes, and trained in the association of spatial with logical or narrative arrangement, wrote and read texts of their own day without using these mental tools at all.

If this is so, then we may go one step further, and posit the possibility that writers from such intellectual milieus, often writing at least partly with their peers in mind, expected their readers to make connections between the

landscapes pored over in the pulpit, schoolroom or scriptorium, and those offered in the new texts. There is room for conscious interplay between the text present on the page and the text brought to the reading moment in the mind of the projected reader. If this is planned or hoped for by a writer, then it may be thought of as a conscious rhetorical strategy, a means of predicting or pre-empting the likely reactions to the new text. If there is a repertoire of landscapes shared by writer and reader, then on occasion the writer may choose to use the knowledge that the reader will bring to the new text in order to manipulate or guide his interpretation of it.

Yet this conscious activity on the part of the writer is not an essential element of the effect I am seeking to describe. It is only necessary for a text to afford the possibility of interpretation in the light of the patterning landscapes. If that is the case, then the door is opened for at least some of the text's contemporary readers to make such an interpretation. Whether or not they did is almost always impossible to determine, since it relies on an event as ephemeral as a thought process during reading. The only trace that such an event could leave would be a written response, a commentary or a creative re-interpretation of the new text's landscape in the same manner as those re-interpretations of the Biblical landscapes discussed above. That the agency in creating this effect has passed from writer to text (or even reader) is for my present purposes of little account. The important point is that such interpretations were possible, that to ignore the ways in which texts can operate on this level is to leave a gap in our understanding of them. The interaction between authoritative models and fresh texts written in the medieval period is part of how those texts work and it

happens in ways more than is often acknowledged. We need to become medieval readers to the extent that we are able, in order to see how medieval texts operate on us.

Engagement with existing mental landscapes is not the only way in which the texts which are the focus of my study use landscape in order to guide or manipulate their readers. I have dwelt on it at length here to demonstrate it as fully as I can, but also to prepare the ground for later chapters, so that in this study as in particular varieties of medieval reading experience the Bible and certain of the Classics are formative texts. With these as an encyclopædia or (to use a more modern analogy) database of stored knowledge about what landscapes are, mean, and can be, I shall know proceed to examine in more detail the landscapes created in the Middle Ages themselves.

Chapter 3:

The landscapes of Arthurian Chronicle

Arthurian texts are, in a sense, an obvious choice for a study of landscape.[95] The realms of Arthur and his knights have long been seen as rich in material for scholars researching the physical worlds created in medieval writings, and the ways in which their physicality is used to suggest the non-physical, to reveal things about the texts' protagonists that writers in subsequent eras would choose to indicate in other ways. Such an approach can be traced back at least as far as Eric Auerbach's monumental study *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.[96] In his chapter on Chrétien De Troyes, 'The Knight Sets Forth', Auerbach pauses to consider the effects of the minimal indications of place and direction that the poem affords in his chosen section:

> Calogrenant [...] had ridden away alone in quest of adventure [...] and he had come upon a road leading to the right, straight through a dense forest. Here we stop and wonder. To the right? That is a strange indication of locality when, as in this case, it is used absolutely. In terms of terrestrial topography it makes sense only when used relatively. Hence it must here have an ethical signification. Apparently it is the "right way" which Calogrenant discovered.[97]

I shall return to examine his remarks in detail below, but for the moment it is enough to note that this passage marks the beginning of a fruitful line of enquiry pursued by subsequent scholars into the significance of landscape in the Arthurian world. Such research has drawn attention to the way in which hints as

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[95] In this thesis, the adjective 'Arthurian' is taken as applicable to any narrative where the primary focus (or one of the primary foci) is either with Arthur, or with a figure usually associated with his court, such as Lancelot, Gawain, Guenevere, or Merlin.

[96] E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, 1968).

to what that world is like are characterised by inconsistencies, omissions and allusiveness, and to the fact that what Auerbach called their 'ethical significance' frequently overrides any realistic function that they may at first appear to serve.[98] The world into which knights errant ride is not so much a physical landscape as a testing ground for their virtue, an exterior means of revealing and producing their nascent manhood and knighthood.

Yet at this point it becomes necessary to be clear about the *kinds* of Arthurian text that are being discussed. The agreement about the symbolic function of landscape in Arthurian romance carries with it the assumption that it does not have a similar function in the genre with which romance stands in implicit contrast: the chronicle tradition. The canon of Arthurian writing can be subdivided according to many different criteria, most obviously according to author (where known), language, country of origin, and date. Scholars frequently also group Arthurian texts according to tone and the method of handling, whether this be epic, comic or romance; or the genre and tradition of writing in which a given text is perceived to stand. Such highly selective groupings affect the ways in which each text is read and run the risk of obscuring certain elements within them,[99] and it must be admitted from the outset that the

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[97] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 128-9.

[98] See for example Laurent Adam, 'La Forêt dans l'œuvre de Chrétien de Troyes', *Europe* (Oct. 1982), 120-5; Roland Bechmann, *Trees and Man: The Forest in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1990); R. Howard Bloch, 'Wasteland and Round Table', *New Literary History* 11 (1980), 255-76; Manfred Gsteiger, *Die Landscaftshilderungen in den Romanen Chrestiens de Troyes: Literarische Tradition und künstleriche Gestaltung* (Berlin, 1958); C. Luttrell, 'The Figure of Nature in Chrétien de Troyes', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 17 (1973), 3-16; Rosemary Morris, 'Time and Place in French Arthurian Verse Romances', *French Studies* 42 (1988), 257-77; Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* (Woodbridge, 1993).

[99] *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands (Exeter, 1986) presents *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* as an example of 'Burlesque and Grotesquerie' comparable with *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*; *Middle English Romances*, ed. Stephen H.A. Shepherd (New York, 1995) groups it with *The Awntyrs off Arthure* as 'Challenges to the Round Table'.

line between the two strands in the Arthurian tradition is never easy (and at times impossible) to maintain.[100] It is notoriously difficult to formulate a definition of romance such that it will include all the texts that circulate under that name.[101] It is notable, and perhaps revealing, that such an important reference work as *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* does not make any attempt to do so.[102] It does, however, include articles on both 'Chronicles, Arthur in' and 'Chronicles in English'. The inclusion of these two entries affirms the distinction between chronicle and romance that I take as a starting point in defining this chapter's area of study. Furthermore, the bias in the distribution of these entries between chronicles and romance as concepts requiring explanation in an Arthurian context is evidence that modern scholarship can tend to see romance as the normative mode for Arthurian writing. If this is so, it supports the contention that chronicles are in danger of receiving less literary-critical attention than the romances, and that it will be profitable to reconsider aspects of them such as landscape in the light of the approaches developed for use on romances.

Granted that the boundaries of 'romance' and 'chronicle' are fuzzy, it is nevertheless possible to outline some principles as a means of differentiating the two. In general, the romance tradition focuses on the exploits or coming-of-age of one or very few more knights, at times linked only tangentially to events at the Arthur's court itself (which is often the point either of departure or return for the main quest narrative), and in doing so it will frequently emphasise aspects of the

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[100] But see P.J.C. Field, *Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style* (London, 1971), pp. 8-35 for an illuminating discussion of historical, stylistic and syntactic features which can provide bases on which to build such a distinction.
[101] For one of the best attempts at defining romance, see W.R.J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London, 1987), pp. 1-6.
[102] Norris J. Lacy, ed., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Woodbridge, 1986).

story that deal with love or the miraculous. In contrast (although not in outright opposition), the chronicle tradition is concerned more directly with Arthur as King and with the establishment, development and ultimate destruction of his reign. From a formal viewpoint, it might be argued that the chronicle tradition is in some ways the romance of Arthur, tracing his life and exploits in the way that romances do for Perceval, Erec, Lancelot or Gawain, for example.[103] Yet the difference is not merely a shift in protagonist, for the focus on Arthur almost inevitably brings with it (or perhaps is motivated by) a concern with the political and 'historical' perspectives of the legend.

The word 'historical' is important here. Modern archaeologists continue to debate and research the possible basis of the Arthur story (or stories) in fact, but for medieval audiences the line between story and history was permeable to say the least.[104] In Caxton's preface to his printing of Malory, he addresses the accusation that might be made against the *Morte Darthur* that all it contains is 'fayned and fables'.[105] Clearly, by the late fifteenth century, the historicity of Arthur was being questioned, and Caxton feels he must allow for this. Yet it is equally evident that he takes great care to use a modesty topos in aligning himself with these doubts, whilst ventriloquising the defence of Arthur's historicity through the mouths of 'many noble and dyvers gentylmen of thys

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[103] Barron usefully draws attention to Aristotle's distinctions between epic, romance and mimetic fiction, highlighting the way in which the hero of romance is 'superior to other men in *degree* [...] by virtue of his superlative, even supernatural abilities' (*English Medieval Romance*, p. 2). This analysis shows the ways in which chronicle texts that emphasise the exceptional qualities of Arthur himself have romance characteristics, but it does not account for the change in tone, emphasis and interest between romance and chronicle.

[104] The many attempts to discover the 'true' Arthur vary in scholarly worth, but the best is still Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634* (Harmondsworth, 1973). More recent efforts include Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (Stroud, 2003), and Rodney Castleden, *King Arthur: the Truth behind the Legend* (London, 2000).

royame of Englond' (*Works*, p. xiii). In other words, he allows space both to voices arguing that Arthur is fact and to voices arguing that Arthur is fiction, but it is the former that have the social prestige, and that win the argument. It is a clever and elaborate way of negotiating the doubts that had arisen by the time that he came to act as printer and editor. There is no sign that Malory himself had any such qualms. For him, Arthur is simply history, and there seems little reason to doubt that in holding this view Malory found himself in the majority amongst readers, writers and hearers who concerned themselves with Arthur in the medieval period. Whether or not every story of Arthur was regarded as true, it seems likely that most audiences agreed that there was at least a true story of Arthur to be told.

This emphasis on historicity and veracity in the chronicle tradition is a powerful reason why, from Auerbach onwards, scholars have tended to pay most attention to the landscapes of Arthurian romance, rather than Arthurian chronicle. To a modern (or even a postmodern) reader, the romances seem to flaunt their fictional status, dwelling upon impossibly perfect love affairs (whatever tribulations may impinge upon them before the denouement), on miracles, wonders, chance meetings, magical tests, neatly balanced narratives where loose ends are laid out simply to be tied up in the closing passages. In such a context, it is easy to accept that those aspects which deal with the material world, including landscape, are present from some other motive on the writer's behalf than reportage. They must 'mean' something other than their physical selves, must point to how the tale works on a deeper level. Yet when we come to the

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[105] Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver (Oxford, 1971), p. xiv. All quotations are

chronicle material, we seem to be dealing with historical writing, with political record, and ideas such as symbolism or latent meaning are less likely to seem immediately relevant.

My purpose in this chapter is to challenge this perception by examining the landscapes of Arthurian chronicle writing in greater detail, trying to avoid the assumption that the choice of setting is dictated purely by a belief on the writer's part that 'that is just what happened'. To return to Auerbach, the use of the direction 'right' in an absolute way, to which he drew attention, makes sense when we realise that Calogrenant is telling the story from his own point of view, and that it is this point of view, that of the knight errant, that matters in the world of romance. In the world of chronicle, the focus shifts, often to Arthur himself, or to the wider national, epochal or dynastic implications of events. Here, the organisation of space will again be used to cue, provoke or suggest certain ways of responding in the audience, but in different ways and to different ends.

Even within the limited field of Arthurian chronicles, there remains too much material for me to examine in meaningful detail within the scope of one chapter, and I am therefore forced to be selective. My interest in this study is firstly in the associations that landscape features had for the writers of the period, and how those wider associations entered and influenced the chronicle tradition. I shall therefore begin by looking at the earliest extant full-length account of Arthur, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.[106] The *Historia*

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taken from this edition.

[106] References to Arthur can be found in texts datably earlier than the *Historia*, such as the writings of Gildas and Nennius, and entries in the *Annales Cambriae*. Welsh Arthurian romances such as *Culhwch ac Olwen* contain internal evidence to suggest that they were first written down

formed the basis of many subsequent chronicle texts, not just as a source of narrative incident or ideas, but as base-text for translations and re-translations. This makes it doubly useful as a starting point, since my other interest is in the ways that landscape is manipulated in order to interpret the narrative or suggest interpretations of it, and these re-visions of one text allow scholars to see the inclusions and exclusions made by readers and re-writers if Geoffrey for their own purposes. For this reason, and because the primary focus of my thesis is on the lands of the Norman *regnum* between c. 1070 and c.1300, the other major texts that I shall examine in this chapter are Wace's *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut* of La3amon.

The landscapes of myth and epic: the *Historia Regum Britanniae*

It is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* that Arthur seems (from our point of view, based on what remains of the medieval texts) to emerge for the first time as the recognisable legendary king.[107] In spite of its prominent position, the *Historia* is a difficult text to evaluate, not least because the manuscript tradition has even now yet to be properly established. Even with

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decades before Geoffrey wrote his *Historia*, even though the surviving manuscripts come from the fourteenth century (see Brynley F. Roberts, '*Culhwch ac Olwen*, the Triads, Saints' Lives', in Rachel Bromwich et al. (eds), *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 73-95, at p. 73). Some scholars believe that these romances originated not decades but centuries earlier than Geoffrey (see *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1968), pp. ix-xii). Nevertheless, since those texts whose manuscripts date from before the 1130s contain only passing references to Arthur, and since the Welsh romances in the form we have them depend on manuscripts from long after the 1130s, Geoffrey remains in an important sense the fountainhead of the Arthurian chronicle tradition.

[107] References in this essay will be to *The* Historia Regum Britannie *of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1985) (hereafter Wright). Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of The Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966) (hereafter Thorpe). Where there is an important difference between the Bern MS. and Cambridge University Library MS. 1706, which was used by Acton Griscom as the basis of his 1929 edition, from which Thorpe in turn made his translation, the difference is noted and translations or emendations to Thorpe are my own. Unfortunately, the edition by Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 2007) appeared too late for me to make use of it here.

an established text (if such a thing were to prove possible), we would still be faced with the problem of knowing what sort of text Geoffrey considered himself to be writing. If even near-contemporary writers such as William of Newburgh could complain 'It is quite clear that everything this man [sc. Geoffrey] wrote [...] was made up, partly by himself and partly by others, either from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons',[108] then what hope is there for the theory of this text as intended history? Such a question has led at least one scholar to argue that Geoffrey is writing a parody of the more 'serious' histories of William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon.[109]

Yet we should be wary of projecting modern notions of parody back into the twelfth century, or of assuming that William of Newburgh was voicing the dominant judgement on Geoffrey's text.[110] Where fact and fiction are combined in a medieval text, the modern reader is faced with an obvious difficulty, namely whether the original author and/or audience knew what was real and what was not, and how they conceived of the difference. Medieval conceptions of truth, fiction and history are complex and shifting, and we cannot assume that they were identical with our own understanding of these terms. Derek Pearsall makes a useful point here: 'To deduce [...] that the Middle Ages had no understanding of the difference between fact and fiction is to imply that the difference modern people wish to make is the best or only one there is.'[111] Clearly medieval thought knew the difference between telling the truth and telling a lie (as any

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[108] Quoted in Thorpe, p. 17.
[109] See V.I.J. Flint, 'The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: parody and its purpose. A suggestion', *Speculum* 54 (1979), 447-68.
[110] On the contrary, Geoffrey Ashe argues that William and Gerald of Wales 'are distinguished spokesmen for what long remains a minority opinion.' (*Arthurian Encyclopedia*, p. 111).
[111] Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2003), p. 9.

number of penitential texts would prove). At the same time there was a prevalent idea of telling something not strictly true in order to communicate truth of a higher order – a concept key to medieval exegesis of Virgil and Ovid.[112] With this mixture of perceptions in mind, Geoffrey is free to write a mixture of literal truth, moral truth and fiction and trust his readers to identify the difference where it matters.[113] Thus there may well be playful and parodic elements in Geoffrey's writing, but we cannot safely ascribe that tone to the whole.[114] Whilst I cannot hope to resolve these questions fully here, I hope to show that a careful examination of what Geoffrey does and does not provide for his audience, specifically with regard to landscape, can shed light on the ways in which he creates or appears to create reality. To put it another way, landscape is a good indicator of what sort of reality Geoffrey thought he was creating.

The first point to be made is that one of Geoffrey's repeated aims is to tie in each detail of the narrative with its physical, historical and textual context. The Arthurian material was one of the main reasons for the popularity of the *Historia*, in the Middle Ages as now, but it is only one aspect of it, and will be misread if seen in isolation or through the lens of the subsequent development of the Arthur story. Almost the keynote of Geoffrey's project seems to be that stories such as those of Arthur should *not* be cut off on their own, but seen as part of a broader context, a wider set of narratives all of which can be inter-linked and

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[112] For an example of this use of Virgil and Ovid, see Jacobus Publicius, *Ars memoratiua*, trans. Mary Carruthers and Henry Bayerle, in Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *Medieval Craft of Memory*, pp. 231-54.

[113] On this issue, see further Lewis, *Discarded Image*, pp. 174-85, and also Paul Magdalino, ed., *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London, 1992).

[114] For a stimulating discussion of the various kinds of tone and purpose ascribed to the *Historia*, as well as an argument in favour of its serious political purpose, see John Gillingham, 'The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*', in The *English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 19-39.

placed within one time frame. At the end of some versions of the text Geoffrey is keen to place his own narratives into the context and accepted history of kings of Wales and the Saxons, as written by Caradoc of Llancarfan, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon:

> *Reges autem eorum qui ab illo tempore in Gualiis successerunt Karadoco Lancarbanensi contemporaneo meo in materia scribendi permitto, reges uero Saxonum Willelmo Malmesberiensi et Henrico Hunendonensi*[.][115]

The text itself provides no reason to assume that this is meant parodically, or tongue-in-cheek, and so we are left to conclude that at least part of the function of the *Historia* is to fill the gaps left by these writers and by others such as Bede, all of whom omitted to write of the Britons before they became the Welsh. To be sure, Geoffrey is also marking out his own territory as historian and enforcing a unilateral peace on anyone who might attempt a competing history of the Britons without the benefit of his alleged Welsh source, but this too is done by means of reference to existing histories by his contemporaries. These texts, then, serve as external 'landmarks' by which Geoffrey positions his own *Historia*.

As with Geoffrey's text in relation to the other histories, so with Arthur inside the *Historia*. Arthur was an attractive figure for Geoffrey,[116] as is clear from the fact that his life and death occupy a little over a fifth of the *Historia*, but he is one of a series of figures in Geoffrey's parade from Brutus to Cadwallader and the degeneration of the Britons. This means that the Arthurian section of the

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[115] Wright, p. 147: 'The task of describing their kings, who succeeded from that moment onwards in Wales, I leave to my contemporary Caradoc of Llancarfan. The kings of the Saxons I leave to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon.' (Thorpe, p. 284).

[116] There is some evidence that Geoffrey's own father may have been called Arthur: see J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London, 1939), p. 524.

Historia has to be linked in to the world of the rest of the text. In the first place, this has to be done chronologically, showing us not only Arthur's ancestry but also his successors. Almost the very last thing that we are told of Arthur is that *Constantino cognato suo et filio Cadoris ducis Cornubie diadema Britannie concessit anno ab incarnatione Domini .dxlii..*[117] This is an impressively full reference, telling us not only to whom Arthur passed the crown, but also fleshing out a little of the dynastic relation and giving us the year in which Arthur died. It anchors Arthur firmly in a political context, in a line of royal succession and the nobility, as well as in the wider history of Christendom. Yet it should be noted that this description is not as full as it may at first appear. For one thing, Geoffrey's attempt to reconcile various historical and narrative chronologies (such as the Arthurian and the Christian, in this passage) is famously problematic.[118] For another, we are not given any specific date within the year 542 (which is itself one of only three years mentioned specifically in the *Historia*, and the only one in the Arthurian section)[119] and there are no details as to how the hand-over takes place. Arthur is mortally wounded and carried off to Avalon, presumably handing the crown to Constantine before he leaves, although we have not previously been told that Constantine was at the battle, or even that he exists.[120] None of these omissions matters much for the purposes of the story, of course, but by noting them we can draw attention to the skill with which Geoffrey is able to create a world which seems self-consistent and full of

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[117] Wright, p. 132; 'He handed the crown of Britain over to his cousin Constantine, the son of Cador Duke of Cornwall: this in the year 542 after our Lord's Incarnation.' (Thorpe, p. 261.)
[118] For a brave attempt to make sense of Geoffrey's timings, see Thorpe, pp. 285-8.
[119] The other two events to which specific years are assigned in the *Historia* are the death of Lucius in 156 (Wright, p. 47) and the death of Cadwallader in 689 (Wright, p. 146). Some later chroniclers added a date within the year 542 for the death of Arthur.
[120] *Set et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est: qui ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus*, Wright, p. 132; 'Arthur himself, our renowned king, was mortally wounded

historical detail. By providing the audience with some scraps of information he is able to suggest that we have been told all there is to know. There is a kind of 'realism' generated through the use of such occasional details which tempts us to believe that we have seen more than was there.[121]

Geoffrey's Arthurian world needs to be linked to others not only temporally and textually, but also (most importantly for this thesis) spatially. All narratives move in space and have to describe that space at least enough to distinguish one part from another. Yet the procedure in the *Historia* is markedly different in this regard from that in the subsequent romances. As an example, one might turn to *Caradoc*, a tale from the *First Continuation* of Chretien de Troyes' unfinished *Perceval*. An early episode in *Caradoc* describes how the hero happens upon a maiden being kidnapped and rides to her rescue. We are told that 'he rode his horse down a small hill and he looked down in the valley where he heard the maiden's loud cries.'[122] There has been no topographical information for some time before this point in the poem, and nor will there be for a good many lines afterwards, so that the landscape reference here cannot be said to be a common feature of the style of the text. Nor, without a place-name, is there any way of identifying this hill and valley with a particular location (such as Cardueil, Quinilli or Carahés, all of which are also mentioned in the poem). The hill does give Caradoc a vantage-point, but practical details like visibility

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and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to.' (Thorpe, p. 261.)

[121] On the use of 'détails inutiles' in creating realism, see Roland Barthes, 'L'effet de réel' in Barthes et al., *Littérature et Réalite* (Paris, 1982), pp. 81-90.

[122] From *Three Arthurian Romances: Poems from Medieval France*, trans. R.G. Arthur (London, 1996), p. 19; for the French text, see William Roach and Robert H. Ivy, eds, *The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes: The First Continuation, Redaction of Mss E M Q U* (Philadelphia, 1950).

can easily be assumed by the poet. Why mention it at all then? The safest assumption is that the poet simply felt it necessary to include some reference to the physical surroundings every now and then as a way of aiding our willing suspension of disbelief, his co-operation in our effort to accept what we are being told (it also reminds the audience that this is a quest, a progress through a physical landscape). If there is any link to the idea, traced in the previous chapter, that valleys are appropriate for battle, then it is a barely acknowledged one. The very oddness of this reference, then, underlines the extent to which romance of this kind does not need to deal much with the physical landscape.

In contrast, Geoffrey's Arthur exists in a world saturated with place names and topographical references. This is perhaps to be expected from his title: he writes about the kings of a specific place, and it is in one sense this place that unites the various stories contained in his text. Certainly, from the very beginning of the Arthurian section, places are important, and little happens without us being told where it takes place. This is closely tied to the political dimension of the story: just as Arthur is identified with Britain, so his allies and enemies are associated with their respective territories. Furthermore, in tales of conquest it is occasionally useful to be able to indicate what areas have been brought under the power of whom.

There is, however, a slightly different category of references to place, where the key fact is not the precise location (a place name) but the nature of the surroundings (the landscape). Two episodes are particularly interesting in this regard, namely the fight between Arthur and the giant of Mont-St.-Michel, and

the battle of Saussy.[123] In both cases, we are given place names, but I want to investigate the possibility that the landscape is as least as important, if not more so, for our understanding of what is happening.

If the reasons for including a fight with a giant seem clear (it bolsters Arthur's reputation as a formidable warrior and also a defender of women), the reasons for the details of it are subtler. Whether or not this episode originated with Geoffrey himself, it is possible to trace other associations of giants with mountains. Earlier in the *Historia*, we are told about the legendary origins of the monument known to Geoffrey's England as Stonehenge, how it was built by giants on Mount Killaraus, from stones they collected from Africa. Merlin moves it by his magic and has it re-erected on Mount Ambrius (Wright, pp. 90-2; Thorpe pp. 195-8). This is the only indication of place for Stonehenge in this section of the narrative. It is referred to once more later, where it is said to have been built *haut longe Salesberia* ('not far from Salisbury'; Wright p. 132, Thorpe p. 262). There is no mention of the modern 'Salisbury plain' here, but it is unlikely that a description of the landscape at Stonehenge, if it were based solely or primarily on observation, would describe it as a *mons* (mountain).[124] Geoffrey may well have confused Stonehenge with Avebury, but this too is on generally level ground.[125] Clearly, Geoffrey cannot be including a mountain here for

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[123] This is the spelling preferred by Thorpe, on the basis of a study of maps of the area around Autun. The Bern MS. Has 'Sessia', the CUL MS. 'Siesia' and the Jesus MS. has 'Assnessia'. Geoffrey the (occasional) parodist would no doubt have been pleased to see the confusion and occasionally desperate attempts to locate the valley in reality caused by the scribal variants here.

[124] This was first noted by J.S.P Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Los Angeles, 1950), p. 40, who comments that, with regard to the village where Stonehenge is found, '*mons* (though often meaning merely hill) does not fit Amesbury and its vicinity.' Tatlock concludes that '[a]s to whether Geoffrey had visited the region there are some slight indications towards the negative [...] But he had an accurate idea of the general location and aspect of this inaccessible monument, probably from accurate hearsay.'

[125] For the confusion, see Thorpe p. 195.

reasons of realism, and his confusion of places suggests he has not seen what he describes. It is more plausible to think that a mountain is required here because it is appropriate as a place for giant-work and magic. I would argue, therefore, that this landscape is dictated not by realism but (possibly) by earlier written sources unknown to us and (certainly) by the mythical associations of mountains with magic and giants.

In each of these cases, there is a cluster of ideas that associate with one another, namely mountains, giants, magic, ritual, burial. A mountain, by virtue of its isolation and inaccessibility, is inevitably a mysterious place, and therefore comes to be associated with social practices that negotiate mystery. These practices will include magic, religion and burial, but also storytelling that deals with the marvellous, including giants. It is hard, then, not to suspect an underlying mythic or legendary root for the episode at Mont.-St.-Michel, if not in the sense of a written source used by Geoffrey, then in more general influences from oral tradition.

The idea that mountains are the realm of giants can be traced elsewhere in the period. Indeed, the Irish provenance given for Stonehenge here suggests parallels with Celtic myth. As an example, one might mention Bran/Bendigeidfran, the giant of the second branch of the Mabinogion.[126] His stature is demonstrated by his ability to wade across the Irish Sea (which we are nevertheless assured was not so wide then: 'ac nyt oed uawr y weilgi yna',

[126] All Welsh quotations taken from *Branwen Uerch Llyr*, ed. Derick S. Thomson (Dublin, 1968); all English translations from *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford, 2007).

Branwen p. 9, *Mabinogion* p. 28). After the disastrous battle at the climax of the tale, Bendigeidfran gives his remaining followers some remarkable instructions:

> Then Bendigeidfran ordered his head to be cut off. 'And take my head,' he said, 'and carry it to the Gwynfryn in London, and bury it with its face towards France [...]'[127]

'Gwynfryn' literally means 'white hill' or 'holy hill',[128] and it has been identified with the site of the White Tower in the Tower of London, although this cannot be proved. Linguistic evidence helps to show just how strong the links are between the ideas of 'head', 'giant/god' and 'hill'. This link was first pointed out by R.S. Loomis in the 1920s, as part of a ground-breaking study into the traces of mythic ancestry behind the Arthur legend.[129] Loomis notes that

> The Welsh word *Pen*, meaning the Head or Chief, was a common title for the Old God [... In *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyued*, the first branch of the *Mabinogion*,] Pwyll and Arawn are called Pen Annwn or Chief of the Other World [...] Pen also means head in the physical sense [...][130]

The conclusion that Loomis draws from this is that Bendigeidfran's decapitation can be understood partly as a survival of the behaviour of what he terms 'the Old God' (not a term whose meaning Loomis is always capable of making clear), and partly as an onomastic explanation for the idiom 'the Entertaining of the Noble Head', festivities in honour of the god who has here become Bendigeidfran. It is not necessary to accept all of these arguments in order to see the importance of Loomis declaration that 'Bran *is* the Noble Head' (p. 148). This means that *pen*

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[127] *Mabinogion*, p. 32; 'Ac yna y peris Bendigeiduran llad y benn. "A chymerwch chwi y penn," heb ef, "a dygwch hyt y Gwynuryn yn Llundein, a chledwch a'y wyneb ar Freinc ef."' (*Branwen*, p. 15).

[128] See H.Meurig Evans et al. (eds), *Y Geiriadur Mawr* (Llandybie, 1958), s.v. *gwyn* ('white holy') and s.v. *bryn* ('hill').

[129] Roger Sherman Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1927). This study has provoked much debate, but its arguments remain useful and in places compelling.

is operating on several levels here. It means the literal head of Bendigeidfran, which punningly both represents and is Bendigeidfran himself through the sense 'chief, god'. Crucially, however, Loomis neglected to mention a third sense of *pen*, where the meaning 'head' is transferred figuratively to the top or head of a mountain, promontory or headland.[131] Here, then, is a linguistic link that connects the ideas of giants/gods (their position as half human and half divine is common enough to be found in the *Γιγαντεζ* of Greek myth and the *nephilim* of Genesis 6, amongst many other places),[132] kings, and mountains. Not only does this help to explain the incident in *Branwen*, but it also shows that the cluster of ideas at the heart of the battle on Mont.-St.-Michel can be traced to an etymological nexus in Welsh, evidence surely that this episode owes its origin to Celtic (and perhaps specifically Welsh) myths.

As if seeking to underline the association of mountains with giants, Geoffrey inserts a short episode into the narrative here, a fascinating aside concerning 'the time he [sc. Arthur] killed the giant Retho on Mount Arvaius'.[133]

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[130] Loomis, *Celtic Myth*, pp. 147-8.

[131] *Y Geiriadur Mawr*, s.v. *pen*: 'pen y mynydd. TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN'. This sense is common in place names: Penmaenmawr, Penrhos and Penmon are all within a few miles of each other along the coasts of Anglesey and the Menai strait.

[132] For a medieval account of giants which links them with the supernatural, see *Des Grantz Geanz: An Anglo-Norman Poem*, ed. G.E. Brereton (Oxford, 1937). This thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century text was translated into Latin in the 1330s, a version known to modern scholars as *De origine gigantum* (see James P. Carley and Julia Crick, 'Constructing Albion's Past: an Annotated Edition of *De origine gigantum*', *Arthurian Literature* 13 (1995), 41-114; Ruth Evans, 'Gigantic Origins: an Annotated Translation of *De origine gigantum*', *Arthurian Literature* 16 (1998), 197-211). These poems tell how the first women to land in the uninhabited islands of Britain feasted until they became fat and were then raped by demons. As *De origine gigantum* states: *Quelibet autem de suo / demone concepit et peperit partum gigantum* ('Moreover, each woman conceived from her demon and gave birth to a giant offspring', as Evans translates it). According to this legend, giants were the first inhabitants of the land, before even Brutus. The belief that Britain was once inhabited by giants is much older, however: the Old English poems *The Ruin* (l. 2) and *The Wanderer* (l. 87) both refer to 'enta geweorc', the work of giants, apparently in reference to Roman ruins (see Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London, 1979), p. 26).

[133] Thorpe, p. 240. *Dicebat autem se non inuenisse alium tante uirtutis postquam Rithonem gigantem in Arauio monte interfecit* (Wright, p. 119).

This begins as a mere comparison, the last time that Arthur had met anyone as strong as the giant of Mont.-St.-Michel. If Geoffrey's purpose were simply to reassert that association, or to give the narrative a feeling of greater depth through the inclusion of minor and half-reported incidents. he could have stopped there. Yet clearly the idea of a giant who makes a coat out of his enemies' beards appealed to Geoffrey, since he sees fit to narrate the whole incident, taking care to emphasise Arthur's superlative qualities throughout. (Even the giant is seen to acknowledge these, promising to put Arthur's beard at the *top* of the coat.) The purpose of this section is clear: it not only shows Arthur's personal fighting prowess, but places him in the company of giants on more than equal terms. The fight with a giant at Mont.-St.-Michel is not to be seen as a unique occurrence; on the contrary, such are the usual adversaries for Arthur. Nevertheless, the ideas of 'fighting' and 'giant' would be enough on their own to dovetail this passage into the narrative. The fact that the earlier fight also took place on a mountain is gratuitous, and the very fact that Geoffrey mentions it casually, without needing to and without making anything further of it, may point to a wider instinctive association of mountains with giants.[134]

Having decided to follow this tradition in setting the fight between Arthur and the giant on a mountain, Geoffrey then faced the choice of what mountain that would be. It need not have been named at all, which would have been as much of a choice as the use of a name, and a common practice in romance tradition, as has been seen above. Several reasons may have led to his choice of Mont.-St.-Michel. It may have been simply due to its fame and prominence in

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[134] Wace is less aware of these associations, or does not care about them: in his retelling of this

the territories of the contemporary successors to Arthur's throne. Mont-St.-Michel was a key stronghold of the Norman territories, and a richly endowed Abbey was built there from the tenth century onwards. This could have provided powerful political reasons for the inclusion of such a location. As a coastal fortress, Mont.-St.-Michel might be thought of as a symbol of Norman power. To make it also the scene of one of Arthur's victories would be an indirect form of flattery to the ruling dynasty under which Geoffrey lived and worked (and perhaps sought patronage).[135]

At the same time, it is not hard to posit other reasons, symbolic in literary rather than political ways, for the choice of this particular setting. Its nature as a tidal island, cut off from the mainland only at high tide, may have added to a sense of mystery surrounding Mont.-St.-Michel. In this regard it is interesting to compare Geoffrey's choice of Tintagel, another rocky outcrop joined to the land by a peninsula, as the place of Arthur's conception. Both are literally marginal places whose links to the 'normal' physical world in which most of day-to-day life is transacted are tenuous in some way. In the case of Tintagel, the connection is permanent but slim; at Mont.-St.-Michel, it is subject to time and tide, sometimes accessible but often not. If Geoffrey's text often seems like fantasy tenuously tied to history, and Arthur is a mythic hero linked into real-life chronologies, then these two locations, which are both simultaneously part of the mainland and continually threatening to separate from it, are appropriate embodiments of these connections between worlds.

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episode, there is no mention of where the previous fight with the giant took place.

[135] Indeed, the two dedicatees of the *Historia*, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and Waleren, Count of Mellent, were members of the Norman élite, suggesting that this was the quarter from which Geoffrey sought preferment.

The descriptions of the island's physical characteristics in the *Historia* are tantalising and necessarily sketchy (they are not the focus of the text, which is precisely what makes them potentially revealing). What sort of conclusions can be drawn from them? There is no way of knowing if Geoffrey ever visited the island, although there is no reason to think that he did (we surely cannot expect him to have visited all the locations in the *Historia*, and I have already suggested that his depiction of Stonehenge is not based on first-hand experience). He shows an awareness of the fact that it is approachable by both land and sea, but makes nothing of the tidal nature of the causeway. He does, however, mention more than once that the mountain has more than one peak.[136] To a modern observer of the island, there appears to be only one, surmounted by the abbey church, but there may be others obscured by later building, or even by the building of Geoffrey's own time, and this cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of his ignorance of the place.

However, the mention of two peaks becomes far more significant if it is interpreted in the context of the story. In fact, it is motivated by dramatic requirements, since Geoffrey wants a preliminary scene between Bedevere and the old woman, in order to prepare us (and frighten us) for Arthur's personal combat, but not to outshine that later scene. Bedevere's mission takes place on the lesser summit,[137] and is therefore both literally and heroically on a lower

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[136] *Ut igitur prope montem uenerunt, aspexerunt quendam rogum super eum ardere, alium uero minorem qui non longe ab altero distabat* (Wright, p. 117); 'When they came near to the Mount, they saw a fire gleaming on the top and a second fire ablaze on a smaller peak.' (Thorpe, p. 238).
[137] The relative status of the two peaks is confirmed when Arthur hears Bedevere's report and sets off for his own encounter, with the giant: *Direxerunt inde gressus ad maiorem montem* [...] (Wright, p. 118); 'Then they made their way to the taller of the two peaks.' (Thorpe, p. 239.)

level than Arthur's deeds will be. This, then, is a dramatic landscape, shaped by the needs of the narrative, rather than vice versa.

The other landscape from the *Historia* that I wish to examine in detail seems a world away in tone from the mythic undertones of giants and remote mountain-tops. In contrast to Arthur's single combat, the battle of Saussy is a military incident that presents itself as comparable to historical battles. These two parts of the narrative might therefore be seen as opposite poles within Geoffrey's writing: the one flaunting its literary credentials and status as fiction, the other using the tone and register of history and insisting it is fact.

Yet it is a truism of modern scholarship that literature and historiography are not mutually exclusive modes of writing, since both involve choices about inclusion and exclusion, as well as questions of presentation. Even though the text ostensibly asks us to accept the battle of Saussy as an historical event, it patterns the narrative with great artistry and attention to the ways in which audience reaction can be guided. No other battle in Geoffrey's Arthurian material is depicted in such detail, or with such obvious care. The account begins with Arthur's arrangement of his troops, followed by his address to them. In a chiastic structure, this is followed by an address to the Roman troops from their commander, Lucius, who then arranges his forces for battle. The formality of Geoffrey's presentation of this battle marks it out as a set-piece for his elevation of Arthur. This is the climax of Arthur's career and his imperial achievements, and in doing so his choice of a valley as the place of confrontation is highly significant.

I have demonstrated in the previous chapter the cataclysmic connotations that battle in a valley can take on, but it is not just the Bible that may lie behind this passage. If the tone and formality of the battle preparation suggests epic, then it is possible that Geoffrey is also drawing on Statius, who has Tydeus ambushed in book II of the *Thebaid*:[138]

> *lecta dolis sedes: gemini procul urbe malignis*
> *faucibus urguentur colles, quos umbra superne*
> *montis et incuvis claudunt iuga frondea silvis*
> *(insidias Natura loco caecamque latendi*
> *struxit opem), mediasque arte secat aspera rupes*
> *semita, quam subter campi devexaque latis*
> *arva iacent spatiis.* (II.498-504)
>
> A spot for guile is chosen. Far from the city a grudging pass constrains two hills; enclosing it is the shade of the heights above, leafy ridges with curving woods. Nature set up ambush for the place, dark aid to hiding. A rough, narrow path divides the rocks midway; below lies a plain, a broad stretch of sloping fields.

There are no explicit verbal parallels between this passage and the *Historia*. Indeed, Statius uses the poetic word *faux* ('throat' and by extension 'narrow pass') to describe his landscape, whereas Geoffrey opts for the more prosaic *vallis* ('valley'). Yet there are some grounds for speculating that the poem has influenced the prose text. Certainly, the *Thebaid* was widely influential in the medieval period, and it is reasonable to expect that Geoffrey knew of it.[139] There are in fact numerous parallels between the two passages, not just the association of a valley and ambush. In each case, one army is from a city that represents the 'old order' of power (in the *Thebaid* this is Thebes; in the *Historia* it is Rome)

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[138] All quotations taken from Statius, *Thebaid, Books 1-7*, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (London, 2003).

[139] For a brief survey of Statius' influence, see P.M. Clogan, 'Chaucer and the *Thebaid* Scholia', *Studies in Philology* 56 (1964), 599-615, at 600; for influence on Dante see C.S. Lewis, 'Dante's Statius', *Medium Ævum* 25 (1956), 133-9; for influence on Chaucer see J.V. Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* (London, 1990), pp. 47-50.

and in each case the army challenging this dominant power seems poised to succeed. Both episodes end with the challenging party victorious, but doomed to ultimate defeat in their larger campaign: Tydeus will survive to help lead the attack on Thebes in which he and most of his comrades are killed, whereas Arthur is poised to make the most of his victory against Lucius when he learns of Mordred's rebellion and is forced to return home to meet his own death.

If the *Thebaid* is an influence here, the differences between the two passages are even more striking than their similarities. Statius presents Tydeus as his hero in this incident, a man whose role as messenger ought to guarantee him safe conduct from Eteocles, the recipient of his message. That ambush is therefore an act of betrayal, and unequivocally aligns our sympathies with the ambushed party. Geoffrey, on the other hand, seems if anything to present the ambush at Saussy as a piece of clever strategy on Arthur's part. It is Arthur who sets out to ambush Lucius, who becomes aware of the *insidias* ('ambush' but also 'treachery') prepared for him, but goes to meet it anyway.

Consciously or not, Geoffrey may well have been influenced by Statius' poem in the creation of this episode. Whether he expected his audience to notice the connection is much more doubtful. If they did so, they would have received a hint as to the events still to come in the narrative of Arthur, but such a general one as to be of little specific rhetorical use. What it could do is set the tone, not only of classical epic (appropriate for the climactic continental battle of Arthur's career), but also for a tale of ultimate heroic defeat.

The matter-of-fact nature of this battle is in marked contrast to the other-worldly and mystical air that attaches to the battle on Mont-St.-Michel. Yet in each case, landscape is a key factor in guiding our perception of events. These things happen where they do because they belong there. In origin, these associations of place and idea are explicable in pragmatic terms. Valleys restrict an enemy's movement and give the attacker the advantage of high ground, and so are perfect for ambush; mountains are inaccessible and often literally unknown, therefore being appropriate sites for magic and the supernatural (quite apart from the link between the ideas of 'elevation' and the divine). However, once these associations have been made, they then enter into narrative traditions, in whatever form. These traditions in turn have shaped Geoffrey's text, making them of interest from literary and intellectual-historical viewpoints rather than purely pragmatic ones.

There is no doubt that Geoffrey's taste as shown in the *Historia* is eclectic and at times almost miscellaneous. He is happy to include influences ranging from indigenous myth to high literate culture from the continent, carefully structured passages alongside seemingly anecdotal asides. Ultimately there can be no single answer to the question of what sort of text he thought he was writing, or the tone of the whole, since the contents are so various and the tone is changed to suit each part of the narrative. This is not a fault in his text, although the frequent demand for a unified conception may be a fault in modern readings of it. However, whilst the search for such unity of purpose may be a false start, the focus on landscape helps to show that there are consistencies in the technique and habits of thought that lie behind the text. One example of this

is the way in which episodes as different as these two combats, Saussy and Mont.-St.-Michel, are both shaped by narrative traditions and texts outside the *Historia*. Both use landscape as a means of maintaining the tone appropriate to the events that they describe, and in doing so, whether consciously or not, they help to guide audience reaction. Looking hard at the landscape world of Arthur helps us understand the literary world of Geoffrey and the *Historia*.

Civilisation and barbarity: the landscapes of the *Roman de Brut*

Whatever doubts may have circulated about its veracity, Geoffrey's *Historia* was immensely popular almost from the moment of its publication. Surviving manuscripts are numerous, and in the last twenty-five years scholars of the text have been able to establish that Geoffrey's text received the indirect compliment of being revised not once but twice, producing what are now known as the First and Second Variant Versions. Both versions abbreviate their original, not randomly but in accordance with detectable tastes, emphasising didactic aspects of the text, or the moral implications and examples that can be drawn from it.[140]

The *Historia* further became the root of the written Arthurian tradition in the vernacular. In the first instance, it was the chief source used by the Anglo-Norman poet Wace for his *Roman de Brut*, a work of some 15,000 lines, composed in octosyllabic couplets, probably within twenty years of the completion of Geoffrey's work.[141] By this time, the First Variant Version must

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[140] See *The* Historia Regum Britannie *of Geoffrey of Monmouth II: The First Variant Version - a Critical Edition*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1988), pp. xi-lxxviii.
[141] See *Wace's Roman de Brut ~ A History of the British: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter, 2006), p. xii. All quotations are taken from this edition.

have been composed, since it is evident that a copy of this was used by Wace as the base-text for his poem, although he also made use of the 'vulgate' version as well (Weiss, p. xviii). The *Roman* is particularly interesting because of the political context into which it was written. La3amon tells us that Wace presented his poem to Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen to Henry II.[142] Henry had come to the English throne in 1154, following a protracted war between his mother Matilda and Stephen, who took the throne (having been elected to it) in 1135, in spite of having previously recognised Matilda as the rightful heir of Henry I. One of the leading Wace scholars, Francoise Le Saux, suggests that the *Roman* may have been written between the treaty of Winchester in 1153 (which recognised Henry II as Stephen's heir) and Henry's accession in 1155. She reasons that Wace (who describes himself as a 'clerc lisant' and who must have had some connections with the court in order to present his poem to Eleanor) probably worked for the Ducal administration in Normandy. If so, he must have been granted some form of leave from his official duties in order to have time to complete so long and complex a poem. Being given such leave for such a reason further suggests that the poem was written to commission, if not *from* the royal couple then at least *for* them.[143]

If this is the case, then we can expect the stance taken by the poem to reflect, at least in some degree, the political chaos from which Henry's reign

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[142] 'a Frenchis clerc / Wace wes ihoten þe wel couþe writen. / and he hoe 3ef þare æðelen Elienor / þe wes Henries quene þes he3es kinges.' ('a French cleric / called Wace, who could write well, had composed / and presented [the *Roman de Brut*] to the noble Eleanor who was the great King Henry's queen', 20-23). All quotations from La3amon are taken from La3amon, *Brut*, eds G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie, EETS OS 250 and 277 (1963 and 1978), but for typographical reasons I have used commas in place of some of the *punctus elevatus* marks printed by Brook and Leslie. Translations are from W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (eds and trans) *La3amon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of La3amon's* Brut (Harlow, 1989).

[143] See Françoise Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 82-3.

emerged. To be sure, these issues were also highly relevant to Geoffrey, but if the *Historia* was completed by the mid-1130s, then for most of the time when it was being written, Henry I was more or less securely on the throne.[144] Wace, writing from the perspective of the 1150s, had the reign of King Stephen and the civil war to draw on in his re-interpretation of the *Historia*, and it would be surprising if this did not help to shape his text. Specifically, we might expect to find an emphasis on questions of legitimacy and what makes someone the rightful ruler of a kingdom. At the same time, the narrative that Wace inherited from the First Variant (and ultimately from Geoffrey) depicts among other things a contest between Britons and Saxons. This had clear resonances for the Norman and Angevin monarchs, conquerors of the Anglo-Saxons within the last hundred years. Henry II also ruled territories in France that abutted Brittany, the area to which some of the Britons were understood to have fled in the wake of the Saxon invasion invited by Vortigern. Of course, as a history of the Britons, this story, in all of its retellings, seeks to gain the audience's sympathies for the British side, but in Wace's context there is an additional reason for emphasising the wickedness of the Anglo-Saxons. Not only were they the enemies of Arthur, but also enemies of the Anglo-Norman *regnum*. As such, it was expedient that they be shown to be morally corrupt, people ripe for conquering.

To do this, Wace uses a landscape opposition of the town versus the forest. In general terms, in the early part of the Arthurian narrative, Arthur and those loyal to him (the side with whom we as an audience are intended to

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[144] This is not certain: Thorpe dated the *Historia* to 1136, but Tatlock considered that 'it is impossible to escape for the writing of the *Historia* the inclusive date 1130-1138' (*Legendary History*, p 437). Recent scholarship seems to concur (see Wright, pp. xi-xvi and Gillingham, 'Context and Purposes', p. 20).

sympathise) are linked to cities. Conversely, the Saxons and others who oppose Arthur are associated with forests. The reasons for this are not hard to imagine. The city, Wace's world, stands for progress, sophistication, and civilisation (the last word shows the etymological link between the concepts of the city and sophistication).[145] These are aspects of Arthur's story that Wace takes especial care to highlight and emphasise. For example, scholars of the text have noted that his usual practice is to prune details of descriptions from what he found in the First Variant version, yet when his poem reaches scenes such as Arthur's coronation and especially his plenary court, the details are not only retained but added to. The effect of this is to increase the sense of wealth and accomplishment around Arthur, but also the civilisation (in every sense) of his court.

In contrast, the forest stands for the absence of civilisation and sophistication, and perhaps most importantly the absence of rule and order. Such a statement needs some justification, since not all forests of medieval England would have the same connotations for a contemporary audience. Some were Chases, areas set apart and maintained for royal hunting purposes, and as such, their connotations were courtly.[146] An example of such a forest can be found in the *Roman de Brut* itself, in the description of Arthur's court at Caerleon:

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[145] This association may have been strengthened by the image of Troy bequeathed to the Middle Ages by Classical Latin epic. See Niall Rudd, 'Towers and Citadels in the *Aeneid*' in Myra Stokes and T.L. Burton, eds, *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 3-12, which argues (pp. 3-4) that Virgil emphasises the height of his cities especially, and goes on to comment 'The hill-town is a piece of handiwork testifying to man's struggle against nature [...] Beauty, antiquity, warlike strength and piety – all are related to the citadel's height, and this blends easily into the notion of epic sublimity' (pp. 5-6).

[146] Some evidence of the economic advantage to the crown and the church that derived from forests can be seen in Richard Fitznigel, *The Ancient Dialogue Concerning the Exchequer* [...] *Now carefully translated into the English by a Gentleman of the Inner Temple* (London, 1758), p. 49: 'There are some forests, out of which, tithes of the settled incomes, are paid to the greater

De l'une part ert la riviere,
De l'altre la forest pleniere.
Plenté I aveit de peissun
E grant plenté de veneisun[.] (10215-8)

On one side was the river, on the other the dense forest. There was plenty of fish and a wealth of game[.]

Yet the remaining forests, those not annexed by the crown, were wilder places, with more negative connotations. These were the forests that lay behind images in later romance, where they are magical and often threatening places, the testing ground for knights errant, the haunt of mythical beasts, wodwos, hermits and sorcerers.[147] In Wace's narrative, the people who spend their time in the forest, or who retreat to it, do so as a sign of their unfitness for civilised life.

To illustrate this, I now propose to look at a series of incidents early on in the Arthurian section of Wace's poem. Before I do so, it will be as well to clarify one point concerning my critical approach here. Much of what I shall have to say depends on close reading of the verbal detail of the poem. I take this to be fundamental, since the verbal artefact itself is the primary object available for study, however complex its manuscript transmission or difficult the problems of establishing a reading. Moreover, the fact that this verbal artefact is written in rhymed octosyllabic couplets proves that the writer has considered at least some aspects of verbal detail to be significant and worthy of his close attention. If we can assume that such a form makes high demands on a poet, we can also assume that a poet who writes in the form at such length (and is chosen and

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churches [...] as almost all, or the greatest part, of what was paid out of the forests, arose from fines and assessments [and was] paid by an annual right'. Fitznigel was bishop of London and a former clerk of Henry II.

[147] See Michael T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers: 1066-1307* (Oxford, 2006).

commissioned to do so) possesses some skill in doing so. This skill is admitted in translating, editing, structuring and rhyming, but there is no *a priori* reason why it should not be found in literary details and verbal patterning too. To argue otherwise is to misunderstand the difference between attempting such a form of writing now, with our post-medieval conceptions of poetry, and attempting it in the twelfth century, when the form was a natural choice for extended narrative.

Moreover, the dominance of narrative makes landscape not less but more telling. The main job of the verse is to tell the story, and it is primarily in the patterns of narrative that any intellectual ideas about race, nationhood, or history will be conveyed. In a poem that works according to such an aesthetic, when we are told that events move to a new location, this is part of the way in which story is used to communicate an idea, whether the use of that setting comes about instinctively or deliberately. Wace is of course dependent on Geoffrey for much of the content of his poem, and the main ways in which his thought, rather than Geoffrey's, can be detected in the text are by examining his excisions and additions. Yet, retention of Galfridian material is just as much of an editorial decision on Wace's part, and deserves to be considered as such. Moreover, the very scarcity of descriptive passages in the poem lends significance to those that it does incorporate. Domenico D'Alessandro has studied this aspect of the *Roman de Brut*, and states that in the whole poem there are only sixty-nine descriptions that last three lines or more.[148] Does this mean that description was not Wace's chief concern? Yes. Does it further mean that description is insignificant in this poem? On the contrary: where a poet does something that is

unusual for him, there is all the more reason to look closely and see why he is choosing to do it here. Thus those references to landscape that Wace chooses to retain from Geoffrey are worthy of analysis as evidence of the ideas and views embedded in the poem. This is all the more true of those instances where, through techniques such as wordplay or repetition, our attention is more explicitly focussed on the landscape.

With this in mind, let us examine the way in which Wace presents the landscapes he inherits from Geoffrey. Arthur's relation to the Saxons is made clear from the start:

> Quant Artur fu reis nuvelment,
> De sun gré fist un serement
> Que ja Saisne pais nen avrunt
> Tant cum el regne od li serunt;
> Sun uncle e sun pere unt ocis
> E trublé unt tut le païs. (9033-8)
>
> Arthur had not long been king when, of his own free will, he swore an oath that as long as the Saxons were in the land they would have no peace. They had slain his uncle and his father and harried the whole land.

The killing of his kinsmen and the threat to the peace of his kingdom are given here as justifications for Arthur's actions, but the phrase 'de sun gré' is also highly significant. Arthur is not compelled to his war against the Saxons, but makes a deliberate decision to take action against them. From the beginning of Arthur's narrative we are given a hint that he sides against the Saxons at least partly because of his own will, rather than from reason, justice or responsibility. Nothing that happens later suggests that this act of will is immoral or

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[148] Domenico D'Alessandro, 'Analisi del descritivo nell' opera romanzeca di Wace', *Annali dell' Istituto Universitario Orientale, Sez. Romanza* 33 (1991), 205-16, especially 209-10; cited in Le Saux, *Companion*, p 106.

unreasonable. On the contrary, the poet continues to portray the Saxons as deserving of this kind of treatment.

The first battle of this campaign is fought against Colgrim, the leader of the Saxons, in a pass near the river Douglas. This choice of location has interesting parallels with the later battle against the Roman army, as discussed above, although the river is associated with four of Arthur's twelve famous victories as far back as the *Historia Britonum* of 'Nennius'.[149] Once defeated, Colgrim retreats to York where he is besieged by Arthur. His only hope of relief is his brother, Baldulf, who is on the coast waiting for the German king, Cheldric, to arrive in support of their campaign against Arthur. His tactic in trying to raise the siege places cunning over courage:

> L'atente de Cheldric laisça,
> A cinc lieues do l'ost ala,
> Si s'enbuscha en un boschage [...]
> Par nuit vuleit l'ost esturmir
> E del siege faire partir,
> Mais alcuns quis vit esbuschier
> Le curut al rei acuintier. (9067-9, 73-6)
>
> He gave up waiting for Cheldric, went five miles away from the army and lay in ambush in a wood [...] He intended to overwhelm Arthur's army by night and make it give up the siege, but someone who saw them in ambush ran to tell the king.

Baldulf chooses stealth and secrecy, the cover of the wood and the night, an underhand form of fighting which links him, however loosely, to the wider theme of treachery and betrayal that runs through the work as a whole, in particular as being the cause of the Britons' downfall. There is a chain of associated ideas

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[149] *Secundum* [*bellum*], *et tertium, et quartum, et quintum super aliud flumen, quod dicitur Dubglas, et est in regione Linnuis*. ('The second [battle], the third, the fourth and the fifth were on another river, called the Douglas, which is in the country of Lindsey' (Nennius. *British History and The Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (London, 1980), pp. 76 and 35.) That

here: betrayal, deceit, concealment, the wood. There is even a hint of word play in line 9069, where the sound of 's'enbuscha' ('to lay oneself in ambush') is echoed in 'un boschage' ('a wood'). This echo or etymological pun draws the audience's attention to the literal root of the verb, namely 'to put oneself in a wood'.[150] At the same time, the verbal play links place and act very closely, and further strengthens the clustering of images and ideas around Baldulf, helping to build a clear impression if not of his character (a word which to the modern reader implies a degree of complexity or realism which it is not appropriate to read into this text), then at least of his moral worth and function in the narrative. Of course, Baldulf's plan is itself betrayed to Arthur, who sends Cador with six hundred knights and three thousand soldiers to deal with Baldulf's army of six thousand. There is surely a sense of ironic justice in this response by Arthur:

> Livra li sis cenz chevaliers
> E de la gelde treis milliers
> Sis enveiad celeement
> Sur Baldulf en l'enbuschement. (9081-4)
>
> He put Cador in charge of six hundred knights and three thousand foot-soldiers and sent them secretly against Baldulf in the ambush.

Baldulf has chosen secrecy as his method of attack, and it is by such secrecy that he is defeated. The pointed use of the phrase 'en l'enbuschement' here underlines this, having as its primary meaning the sense 'in the place where Baldulf had set up his ambush' but also glancing at the idea of 'by ambush'. This sense is drawn out by Wace's comment that 'Unches li Saisne mot n'en sorent / Ne cri ne noise oï n'en orent' (9085-6; 'The Saxons never heard a word,

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Nennius was one of Geoffrey's sources is shown by several instances cited by Tatlock, *Legendary History* (see the Index, s.v. 'Nennius' *Historia Britonum*').

[150] See A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch (eds), *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1925-74), s.v. *embuschement*, and s.v. *embuschier*.

nor cry, nor any sound'). The most probable reason for this narrative turning of tables is to show the essentially double-edged nature of betrayal, that once one begins to deal in deceit one should expect to be deceived. Yet there is another possibility, namely that there is something about this wooded landscape which encourages concealment and unfairness in the broadest sense. As the episode continues, this association is strengthened. In spite of the numerical inferiority of the British forces, Cador is able to defeat Baldulf's band convincingly (a sign of the justice of Cador's cause) but factors beyond his control prevent a rout:

> Plus en ocist de la meitied,
> Ja n'en laissast aler un pied
> Se la nuit obscure ne fust
> E se li bois ne li neüst. (9089-92)
>
> He killed more than half of them, and would not have let a single one escape if the night had not been dark and the wood a painful impediment.

The night and the wood, elements chosen by the treacherous Saxon for his intended attack, now prevent Cador from achieving the total victory that the text tells us in some senses he deserves. Time and place are conspiring against justice, and so they become traitors themselves. Baldulf characteristically takes full advantage of the treacherous nature of his surroundings: 'Baldulf s'en tresturna fuiant, / De buissun en buissen muçant' (9093-4; 'Baldulf turned and fled, taking cover from bush to bush'). The word 'buissun' and, particularly, the phrase 'en buissun' make further play with the sounds already heard in the words 's'enbuscha', 'boschage' and 'enbuschement', as discussed above. Sound, object and moral judgement are thus reiterated throughout this passage, each one of these elements continually reinforcing the others.

Following advice from his barons, Arthur retreats to London to reinforce and regroup his army, and engages Cheldric's forces again at a place Wace calls Nichole (perhaps because his exemplar had a garbled version of 'Lincoln', since this is the name given in some of the MSS of the *Historia*). This time, Cheldric is besieging rather than the besieged, but even this tenuous grasp on the world of civilisation and the town is broken for him when Arthur attacks and forces him to flee through a wild landscape:

> Gettent armes, laissent chevals,
> Fuient par munz, fuient par vals,
> Par les eues vunt trebuchant
> E mult espessement neiant. (9179-82)
>
> They threw down their weapons, left their horses and fled through the mountains and valleys, reeling through the rivers and drowning in large numbers.

The retreat to the uninhabited areas is logically inevitable, if the fleeing army is to avoid contact with the people of the land, yet it is also subtly suggestive of a retreat from the loci of moral authority. This movement climaxes when the Germans and Saxons take refuge in Celidon Wood, a place which has many of the same symbolic overtones as that in which Baldulf sheltered and frustrated Cador. Given this, Arthur's response is interesting:

> D'une part fist le bois trenchier
> E bien espessement plaissier,
> Arbre sur arbre traverser,
> E trunc sur trunk fist encroer. (9195-8)
>
> He had some of the trees in one part cut down and made into a thick barrier of interwoven branches, tree crossing tree and trunk hooked to trunk.

Consciously or not, what Arthur does here is an act of civilisation. This is the earliest recorded reference to plashing, the technique of making fences from

growing trees.[151] This civilises or tames the wood in itself, as an act of deliberate forestry, but also turns it effectively into a besieged city. The military implications of this are clear: Cheldric is trapped and has to negotiate terms of his own surrender in return for safe passage out of the kingdom. Yet there are perhaps moral implications here too. Arthur, in plashing the whole wood, turns it from a wild place into a fortress. His influence here is to change his surroundings to something more like a city, more like the seat of courtliness and moral value. From the opposite perspective, we can understand this as being the appropriate kind of city for Cheldric, a wild one, almost a parody of a city, as he is a travesty of the good ruler typified by Arthur.

Forced to surrender, the Saxons are granted leave to depart in return for perpetually keeping peace with the Britons. Once under sail between England and Normandy, the Saxons decide to break their promise and return to Britain, landing at Dartmouth and warring on the countryside. They eventually make it as far as Bath, but the townsfolk prevent them from entering it. Arthur arrives to do battle with the old enemy, and arranges his forces in readiness 'Juste un bois, en unes granz plaines' ('Beside a wood, in a great plain'). These are passing details of setting and should not be granted undue attention, especially since 'plaines' is chosen at least in part in order to provide a rhyme for 'compaines' ('troops'), the real narrative 'business' of this couplet. Yet what happens to the location during the course of the battle is perhaps more significant. Arthur's attack is more than the Saxons can endure at first:

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[151] See Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, p. 231, and Matthew Bennett, 'Wace and Warfare', *Anglo-*

Mais cil nes pourent sustenir;
A un munt ki pre ert turnerent
E ki ainz en sum munterent;
Illuec se sunt cuntretenu
E forment se sunt defendu,
Cume s'il fussent clos de mur. (9306-11)

But the Saxons could not withstand them; they turned to a nearby hill and vied with each other to gain the summit. There they held out and defended themselves as vigorously as if they were surrounded by walls.

Once again, the Saxons seek help from the wild landscape, this time a hill. This is one of the rare occasions where height is not associated with right or virtue. Instead, the flight from the plain shows military weakness but also moral cowardice, leaving the appropriate field of battle (the plain by a wood has echoes of the list) for the less civilised country of hills. The hill ultimately provides nowhere to go, and as such it is a trap as much as a refuge. Once again, the description of the Saxon's surroundings glances at the idea of a city, only to deny that idea simultaneously: they fight '[c]ume s'il fussent clos de mur', '*as if* they were surrounded by walls' (emphasis added). This comparison draws attention to what the Saxons do not have, namely a city, and this absence further underlines their dissociation from courtly morals and virtue.

Although they are both Arthur's enemies, the Saxons and Romans are presented in subtly different ways. The relationship between the Britons and the Romans is almost Oedipal in nature.[152] On the one hand, Rome is a threat, a rival imperial power. On the other, it is the model for the greatness to which Britain aspires, not simply militarily but in terms of sophistication, moral

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Norman Studies 11 (1988), pp. 37-57, at p. 57.
[152] Brutus, the founder of Britain, was after all the great-grandson of Aeneas, the founder of Rome.

strength and culture.[153] Of Arthur's court at Caerleon, the climax of his rule, which comes when his power is at its height and before the downfall brought about by Mordred and Guinevere, we are told that 'A cel tens, ço distrent li hume / De riches palaiz semblot Rome (10209-10; 'Men said at that time that its [sc. Caerleon's] rich palaces made it another Rome'). This should come as no surprise, since we have previously learned that 'N'esteit parole de curt d'ume, / Neis de l'empereür de Rome' (9739-40; 'there was no court so talked about, not even that of the Roman emperor'). Finally, we should remember that Wace takes special care to point out that in his version of the Arthur story Guinevere is 'Bele [...] curteise e gent / E as nobles Romains parente' (9847-8; 'Beautiful [...] courteous and well born, of a noble Roman family). Cador, too, who takes such a key role in fighting against the uncivilised Baldulf, is descended from the same city: 'sa mere esteit romaine' (9652; 'his mother had been Roman').

Rome must be shown to be opposed to Britain, and our sympathies as an audience must remain with the Britons, yet the Romans must still conduct themselves in a way which is in some ways still admirable. To return to the discourse that I used in discussing the Saxons and Britons above, it is no longer a question of the distinction being between the wild and the courtly, but rather between the courtly and the courtlier. Hints of this are apparent from the very opening of the account of Arthur's wars against Rome in France. Amongst the details of his conquests, we are told the manner in which Arthur waged this war:

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[153] See the discussion of Rome and Troy, pp. 66-71 above, and for contemporary conceptions of Rome in the context of emerging English imperialism, see Judith Weiss, 'Emperors and Antichrists: Reflections of Empire in Insular Narrative, 1130-1250', in Phillipa Hardman, ed., *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 87-102, especially 87-90.

Sagement fist sa gent cunduire,
Ne volt pas la terre destruire,
Viles ardeir ne robes prendre;
Tut fist veer e tut defendre
Fors viande e beivre e provende,
E si l'um trove ki la vende,
A buens deniers seit achatee,
Ne seit toleite ne robee. (9897-904)

He made his men behave prudently, not wanting the land destroyed, the towns burnt or booty taken; he prohibited and forbade them anything except meat, drink or fodder, and if anyone could be found to sell it to them, it should be bought with good money, not seized or stolen.

Wace goes out of his way here to make it clear that Arthur conducts his conquest in the most responsible way possible, protecting the land, its people and economy. With this flattering image of Arthur's campaign established, Wace goes on to describe the legal status of the land:

France aveit nun Galle a cel jur
Si n'i aveit rei ne seinnur;
Romain en demainne l'aveient
E en demainne la teneient. (9905-8)

In those days, France was called Gaul and had neither king nor overlord. It belonged to Rome who possessed it.

The English translation is perhaps more definite than Wace's poem here, since the latter does not use the verb 'belong' but rather an idiom which literally means 'Rome had it [sc. France/Gaul] in its power, and held it in its power'. The ambiguity of this phrasing creates an element of doubt as to the legitimacy of Roman rule in France. The fact that we are told that the country 'had neither king or overlord' immediately suggests that there is an empty post waiting for Arthur to fill it. The final element of preparation in this section comes when we are told about the Roman governor of France, Frollo, who 'fu mult de grant vigur; / Des nobles humes ert de Rome, / Ne dutot par sun cors nul hume.' (9914-6; 'was a man of great prowess; one of the Roman nobility, he was physically

afraid of no one.') Frollo's credentials as a worthy opponent for Arthur are stressed here: he is brave, of noble birth, and a man of great strength. In these few lines (9897-916), Wace establishes that each side has a highly admirable leader, and complicates the question of who has the right to power over France. This successfully allows him to engage both our interest and to some extent our sympathies for both sides at once.

Concerns such as these also inform the landscapes in which the Romans act, especially those in which they make war. When Frollo's forces meet Arthur for the first time, they do so in an unspecified location, and we are told nothing of their surroundings, merely that Frollo lost. He retreats to Paris and takes refuge there. In this, we may perceive a parallel with the behaviour of the Saxon Colgrim, who also loses his first battle against Arthur and is also besieged within a city, in his case York. Yet whereas Colgrim has to be rescued (not by Baldulf's unsuccessful attempts at ambush and deception but by Cheldric, we presume, between landing in Scotland and fighting the Britons at 'Nichole'), Frollo behaves differently:

Frolles vit le pople destreit
Pur la vitaille ki failleit,
Vit lé genz, ki de faim mureient,
E vit que rendre se vuleient,
Vit la cité mise a eissil.
Mielz volt sun cors mettre en peril
E en abandun de murir
Que plainement Paris guerpir;
Bien se fiout en sa bunté. (9991-9)

Frollo saw the people distraught for lack of food and men dying of hunger, saw they wished to surrender and saw the city made destitute. He preferred to endanger his body and risk his life rather than totally abandon Paris; he relied on his valour.

Here, phrases such as 'le pople destreit pur la vitaille ki failleit' and 'lé genz, ki de faim mureient' suggest initially that Frollo's reason for acting is going to be compassion for the people, a sentiment analogous in some ways to that behind Arthur's orders to his soldiers not to loot the land, as discussed above. Yet the lines above are preceded by the cries of 'la gent povre', who are all for surrendering the city in order to avoid starvation (these cries occupy one couplet in most MSS, but MS J augments this with a further two couplets). The lines quoted go on to make it clear that it is Frollo's fear that the townspeople will surrender which incites him to risk his own life first. This moment creates a sharp distinction, not so much between Parisian and Roman as between poor and noble, a class-consciousness which is also a value judgement. The poor put their lives before honour, in the form of surrender; Frollo does precisely the opposite. Thus Frollo, even though he is not as perfect as Arthur, is still a man of the same class and values, and once again his worthiness as opponent is underlined.

Accordingly, his chosen course of action is one that the Saxons would never have dreamed of:

> Al rei Artur ad fors mandé
> Que il dui en l'isle venissent
> E cors a cors se combatissent,
> E li quels d'els l'autre ocirreit
> U qui vif veintre le purreit
> La terre tut a l'altre eüst
> E tut France receüst[.] (10000-6)
>
> He sent word to king Arthur that the two of them should come to the island and fight in single combat, and whoever killed the other, or could take him alive, would have all the other's land and receive all France[.]

This is a distinctly courtly gamble, and there is no military reason why Arthur should accept. He could easily starve Frollo into surrender, or provoke an

encounter between his armies and those of Frollo that remain (the Britons have been infallibly successful so far). The terms of the challenge are also rather puzzling: once it has been said that the winner will 'have all the other's land', what need is there to mention that he will also 'receive all France', since France is the only land that Frollo could call his own and could therefore wager against Arthur's Britain, Scotland, Ireland and Norway? (He is in no position to offer the whole Roman empire.) The first answer that must be given to this question is, as always, that the exigencies of rhyme may have provoked a 'filler' line here, yet it may also be that Frollo betrays his own arrogant certainty of success.

Nevertheless, that he makes such an offer and is prepared to risk his own life demonstrates that Frollo knows and understands the courtly values that play such an important part in dividing our sympathies in the Arthurian section of Wace's poem. Furthermore, it is to this noble or courtly sense of the right way of behaving that Arthur responds, as we are told that 'Arthur volt mult cel mandement / E mult li vint bien a talent' (10009-10; 'Arthur liked this request very much and it greatly pleased him'). This is not just because it will save the people of Paris from starvation (which Frollo stressed in his message to Arthur, tactfully or tactically omitting to mention that as a result they were ready to surrender). Rather, it is a way of showing that these two men belong to the knightly class, and that they are willing to put their trust in their own personal strength and bravery.

The setting for this encounter between Arthur and Frollo is therefore not a surprise. In Frollo's challenge it is simply 'l'isle' (10001), which must mean an

island in the middle of the Seine, presumably the isle de la cité.[154] Wace then adds (10018) that there is a 'pré' (meadow) on the island. These two features create a natural form of the lists, with flat open ground for a fair fight, surrounded by a natural obstacle to prevent any interference from the bystanders. The isolation of the island further heightens the sense of Arthur and Frollo as men set apart, by rank but also (and inextricably from that) by virtue. It is worth noting that during the whole episode (9909-10104), with the exception of one passing reference to the Roman emperor Leo (9913) Arthur and Frollo are the only individuals mentioned by name. The knightly comparisons in this section are to be drawn only between them, without any reference to the nobles in Arthur's army.

Having conquered Paris, Arthur splits his army into two companies and instructs Hoel to take one of them and conquer large parts of the kingdom. He duly does so, subduing in the process Guitart, the Duke of Poitiers. Guitart puts up valiant resistance, but finally concedes defeat when he sees the toll that the war is taking on his lands:

> Pais fist e concorde a Hoel,
> Kar, fors de tur e de chastel,
> Nen out remis rien a guaster,
> Ne cep ne vinne a estreper. (10125-8)
>
> He made peace and a treaty with Hoel because, apart from towers and castles, nothing was left to destroy, neither plants nor vines to be despoiled.

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[154] La3amon states that 'Þat æit-lond stondeð ful iwis inne þere burh of Paris.' ('That island, as is well known, stands within the city of Paris', 11829). There may be a parallel with an episode in Beroul's late twelfth-century *Roman de Tristan* where the hero fights off a series of assailants 'Sor la mote, au chief de la mare' ('On the mound, at the end of the marsh', l. 3615), in a position where the watery land around him both enables him to win but also shows a contrast between his steadfast character and his opponents' less admirable natures. See Beroul, *The Romance of*

This glance at the cultivated parts of the landscape (plants and vines) helps to keep the motifs of wildness and civilisation in view for the audience.

A similar touch is found a few lines further on, in the description of the army's homecoming to England. Wace skilfully draws attention to the details of this event, as seen from the viewpoint not just of the nobility but of the ordinary soldiers, and their families. He notes that people gather to meet with them 'Par rues e par quarefors' ('In streets and at crossroads'). This glimpse of urban scenes contrasts with the untamed forests seen earlier in the narrative, and reinforces the association of the British with civilisation and sophistication. This acts as subtle but effective preparation for the climax of the presentation of Arthur as perfect king, his plenary court at Caerleon, which I have mentioned above.

This court is undoubtedly designed to show Arthur at the peak of his glory, even though some of his greatest military successes lie ahead of him. It is broken up by a challenge from the Roman emperor, an event which precipitates the last of Arthur's European wars. The course of this campaign, and Arthur's decision to begin it, are subjects of debate amongst scholars of the various versions of the story. It has been argued that some later works, for example the *Alliterative Morte Darthure*, are critical of Arthur's belligerence, and show him becoming as tyrannical as those whom he opposes.[155] In this context, it is interesting to note the use of landscape in Wace's treatment of this part of the Arthur story, and the way in which it can be read as raising questions about the

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Tristan, ed. A. Ewert, 2 vols (Oxford, 1939). I am grateful to Donna Yesson for bringing my

extent to which Arthur and his court still represent the civilised values of which they were earlier emblematic.

The arrival of the Roman ambassadors at the plenary court is clearly a turning point in the story, and initiates its final phase. This phase can be read (and has been) as either a series of glorious imperial victories snatched away by elegiac tragedy, or overweening tyranny abroad meeting with nemesis at home. It is appropriate, then, that somewhat ambivalent surroundings are provided for Arthur from the beginning of this phase. When the king wishes to consider his response to the threat from Rome, he retires with his nobles:

> Ses dux, ses cuntes, ses privez
> Ad tuz li reis od sei menez
> En une sue tur perrine
> Que l'un clamot Tur gigantine. (10727-30)
>
> the king took all his dukes, counts and friends with him into a stone tower of his called the Giants' Tower.

As ever, there are eminently sensible reasons for the use of a tower, since it is after all a place of defence and refuge, but also of seclusion and privacy for debate and counsel. In a sense, this function makes them emblematic not only of safety but also, once again, of civilised places, fortified towns, and strength deriving not only from might but also from wisdom. (We remember that the Duke of Poitiers surrendered when nearly all of his lands had been destroyed 'fors de tur e de chastel', a detail that in retrospect seems judiciously placed to anticipate the importance of the tower here). Yet the curious appellation 'Tur gigantine' may give some cause for concern. Does this simply magnify Arthur's

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attention to this episode.

[155] See for example Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 193-4.

prowess by equating his might with that of a giant, or by giving him a tower large enough to belong to or be built by a giant?[156] In a few hundred lines we will be at Mont.-St.-Michel, and there will be no doubt that giants are agents of malice, certainly not an entirely favourable vehicle for comparisons with the hero-king.

I have argued above that in the war with the Saxons, Wace seeks to align audience sympathy with Arthur by associating him and his forces with the city, and his enemies with the wilderness, particularly in their use of it as a place of retreat. Yet early in the new campaign, it is Gawain and his fellow messengers who are forced to do hide in a forest. This incident is prepared by several comments and phrases that draw attention to Gawain's position as an example of civilised values. He is chosen for the embassy to the emperor precisely because he has 'spent a long time at Rome' ('Walwein [...] / Qui a Rome out lunges esté', 11653-4), and is therefore familiar with this court of courts and its civilised ways. Travelling to the emperor's court, Gawain, Gerin and Bos have to make their way briefly through a string of wild landscapes ('Cil passerent une muntaine / E puis un bois, puis une plaine'; 'The messengers crossed a mountain, then a wood, then a plain.' 11689-90). These passing details not only act as a transitional passage between the courts of Arthur and the emperor, but also renew the idea of uncivilised landscape. In doing so, they hint at a fall from courtliness for Gawain, his journey away from the behaviour that ought to typify Arthur and his court.

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[156] See footnote 132, above.

This impression is strengthened by Gawain's retreat to the forest when he and his companions are being chased away from the Roman court. They reach the 'bois' at line 11878, and here they encounter the six thousand knights whom Arthur has sent to reconnoitre the land in preparation for any attack. With these additional forces they are able to make the Romans withdraw, but they in turn receive support from the troops of a Roman commander called Petreïus: 'Cil oï parler de l'aguiat / Que li Bretun aveient fait' ('He heard tell of the ambush which the Britons had made', 11909-10). The word 's'enbuscha', so key to the lines discussed above, describing the battle with Baldulf, does not occur here, but the word 'aguiat' (ambush) is common to both passages.[157] Certainly, we cannot expect that any audience would remember a single word from over two thousand lines earlier, but it does suggest that Wace considers the two actions, by Baldulf and by the Britons, to be in some sense the same. If this is so, then the heroes of the poem are being aligned with the barbarians in their tactics, and their environment. This could be a tacit comment on the conduct of this war.

Perteïus attacks, with immediate effect:

Par dreite force e par destreit,
Od les armez qu'il cundueit,
Fist les Bretuns el bois rentrer,
Ne porent mie cuntr'ester.
Dessi al bois dura la chace
Que ne li porent tenir place.
Al bois se sunt cuntretenu
E al bois su sunt defendu. (11913-20)

By pure force and compulsion, with the troops he led, he made the Britons retreat to the wood; they could not resist. The pursuit lasted right up to the wood, because they could not stand their ground. In the wood they fought back and in the wood they defended themselves.

[157] It is Wace's usual word for a trap; he uses it to describe the ambush laid by the Romans later

The actions of the Britons are of course presented as a narrative necessity: 'Par dreite force e par destreit'; 'Ne porent mie cuntr'ester'; 'ne li porent tenir place'. Nevertheless, it is possible to see the flight to the wood as a loss not only of ground or prestige for the Britons but also a reversion, however temporary, to the uncivilised ways of their erstwhile enemies. The poem certainly goes out of its way to reiterate the word 'bois' (four times within eight lines), and the last two lines quoted re-enforce the identification of person with place. The repetition of 'al bois' is strictly unnecessary for sense, and there is little need for rhetorical flourish here. The main reason for repeating this adverbial phrase seems therefore to be to keep the location firmly in the foreground, to underline the connection between what is being done and where it is being done. This emphasis continues in the lines that follow (11921-6) with two further mentions of 'bois', one of which is especially intriguing. Wace tells us that Petreïus lost many of his men 'because the Britons cut them down and dragged them inside the wood' ('Kar li Bretun les abateient / E dedenz le bois les traeient', 11923-4). Are these two separate actions, or do the Britons drag the bodies of those they kill into the forest? If the latter, then this seems an unnecessary act, and an almost savage detail.

Once Arthur sends support to his beleaguered forces, the fighting becomes a series of individual combats, which take place in an undifferentiated area outside the forest. This lack of description contrasts with the re-iterated 'bois' of the fight in the wood, just as the courtly connotations of single combat do with the wild and uncivilised undertones of the forest.

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on, at 12139: 'Es vus cels devant sur l'agueit / Que cil de Rome avaient fait'.

La3amon's *Brut*

By the opening decades of the thirteenth century, a poet known only to us as La3amon had translated the *Roman de Brut* into English verse, in a metre that has clear affinities with the Old English alliterative verse, as well as striking differences from it.[158] The poem exists in two manuscripts now in the British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ix and Cotton Otho C.xiii, but the former represents not only a fuller version of the text, but one closer in language and orthography to the author's original.[159] I shall therefore use the Caligula version as the basis of my comments here.

In terms of landscape, La3amon adds perhaps surprisingly little to Wace (given that, according to one method of comparison, the English poem is 'more than twice as long' as the Anglo-Norman one).[160] Yet it is notable that some of his most striking additions are not only amongst the finest pieces of writing in the poem, but also have a very strong sense of place.

An excellent example of this is found in the battle of Bath. Both Geoffrey and Wace record that this battle took place largely on a hill overlooking Bath, and that Colgrim was killed. Geoffrey comments on Arthur's anger (he is described as *indignatus* [Wright p. 104], which Thorpe translates as 'berserk', p.

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[158] The most in-depth study is W. Hilker, *Der Vers in Layamon's* Brut (Münster, 1965).
[159] Brook and Leslie give an account of the manuscripts in their edition (pp. ix-x identically in each volume), but their full discussion of the text's orthography and likely manuscript transmission was to have appeared in the third volume of their edition, so far unpublished and likely to remain so. Barron and Weinberg deal briefly with the question of the poet's dialect, pp. x-xii, but for a more recent survey of some of the key issues surrounding the text, see Kenneth J. Tiller, *La3amon's* Brut *and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 22-29.
[160] Barron and Weinberg, *La3amon's Arthur*, p. xxviii.

217), whereas Wace follows the First Variant Version in leaving the audience to deduce this from Arthur's actions, and the fact that 'Arthur fought with great harshness, power and valour' ('Artur fu mult de grant aspresce, / De grant vigur, de grant prüesce', 9349-50). La3amon, however, takes these three elements and goes to a further extreme, creating a moment that feels more Anglo-Saxon than Anglo-Norman.[161] Rather than merely exhorting his troops, as he does in Wace, Arthur addresses his enemy, both before and after he has killed him.[162] The taunt to the corpse is striking:

> Lien nu þere Colgrim þu were i-clumben ha3e,
> and Baldulf þi broðer lið bu þire side.
> nu ich al þis kine-lond sette an eower ah3ere hond.
> dales & dunes & al mi drihtliche uolc.
> Þu clumbe a þissen hulle wunder ane hæ3e,
> swulc þu woldest to hæuene nu þu scalt to hælle. (10694-9)
>
> Now lie there, Colgrim, you who climbed so high, and your brother Baldolf shall lie by your side. I now entrust this whole kingdom to you in person, hills and dales, and all my worthy subjects. You climbed very high upon this hill as if you would climb up to heaven – now you shall sink down to hell!

This is a darkly comic speech in which the central idea of reversed expectations is worked out in a number of ways. Most obviously, Arthur declares that he has reversed Colgrim's own hopes of elevation: instead of rising to become king, he has been killed and his soul damned to hell. This links two metaphorical uses of height/depth. The first is the social hierarchy, with kings at the top; the second is relative positioning of realms in the afterlife. The point of the joke is that in seeking to climb the former, Colgrim has not only failed but also managed to fall down the latter. The image is complicated further by the fact that both of these

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[161] For the change in tone and style between Wace and La3amon, see C.S. Lewis, 'The Genesis of a Medieval Book', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 18-40, especially 23-33.
[162] Compare the set speeches and taunts of Anglo-Saxon battle poetry, as in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. D.G. Scragg (Manchester, 1981), ll. 45-61.

schema are tied in not just to each other but to the physical landscape as well, which thus serves to illustrate both. This is an explicit instance of La3amon's use of setting as comment on narrative themes, and in a sophisticated way, for the hill above Bath becomes not only a straightforward metaphor for his ambitions, but also an ironically inappropriate setting for his death and damnation.

The connection between place and ideas is all the more striking, since the landscape came first, and the speech afterwards. As I have already noted, La3amon found the hill in his sources, and it seems to have been this landscape which stimulated his imagination to create a speech, heightening the dramatic and emotional tension inevitable in this point of the narrative by means of a play on spatial metaphors. What we seem to have here, then, is an example of La3amon reading someone else's landscapes in precisely the way that I am suggesting we need to read both theirs and his.

There are other 'inversions' in this speech. It is highly likely that line 10699 plays on Matthew 11.23: *et tu Capharnaum numquid usque in caelum exaltaberis usque in infernum descendes* ('And thou Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? thou shalt go down even unto hell'). If so, then the transfer of words or at least ideas from the mouth of Christ to that of Arthur glances at parody, even if of a very grim kind in this context.

Finally, there is the sarcasm of the middle sentence, where Arthur mockingly abdicates rule to the dead Colgrim in a gesture underlining the

ridiculous nature of the latter's aspirations. Here, Arthur hands over the 'kinelond' and the 'drichtliche uolc', but in between these there is not only the verbal clause but also the phrase 'dales and dunes'. This permits subtly different interpretations. If one takes the second element of *kinelond* literally, then this phrase is parallel with it, perhaps merely filling out a line.[163] Yet it is possible to read the whole of line 10697 as a gloss on the preceding line, so that the kingdom is composed of three elements, valleys, hills and people. In either case, the land itself is brought physically to the fore, underlining the close ties between the ideas of kingship and place.

One further addition to La3amon's sources deserves attention here. Both Wace and Geoffrey deal only briefly with the moment where Arthur learns of Modred's treason, but La3amon treats it at considerable length. Amongst his innovations are a messenger who cannot bring himself to broach the bad news and, inspired by Arthur's earlier vision concerning the coming wars in France (12767-85), a dream which, in symbolic form, predicts the coming disaster (this passage, from 13984 to 14015, is sadly too long to quote here in full). Some of the symbolism in the dream is easy to interpret. In Anglo-Saxon culture the hall is the seat and symbol of kingship, and Modred's attack on the fabric of the hall in Arthur's dream is an attack on Arthur's rule itself.[164] More enigmatic and intriguing are the landscape references in this dream. The first comes after Walwain, Modred and Wenheuer have been killed and the people have all fled.

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[163] The second element of 'kinelond' is *lond* in the sense of 'A territory considered as a political unit' (*MED* s.v. *lond* 1(a)); the first is derived from the OE *cyne*, 'used in compounds, signifying *kingly, royal, special*' (*An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth. Supplement by T. Northcote Toller, with revised and enlarged addenda by Alistair Campbell* (Oxford, 1972) (hereafter Bosworth-Toller), s.v. *cyne*).

Arthur finds himself alone: 'miseolf ich gon atstonden uppen ane wolden' ('I myself was left standing upon a hill', 14004). The location suggests many things – isolation, vision, and any number of parallels with figures such as Moses or Jesus, as discussed in chapter 2 – without being obliged to confirm any of them. This allusiveness is characteristic of prophetic vision, and it is a mode which appeals particularly to La3amon.[165] Arthur wanders off over the moors ('ich þer wondrien agon wide 3eond þan moren', 14005), and some audiences may have remembered the way in which Grendel was associated with such a landscape.[166]

Most suggestive of all is the watery element of Arthur's dream:

> Þa leo me orn foren to an iueng me bi þan middle
> and forð hire gun 3eongen and to þere sæ wende.
> And ich isah þæ vðen i þere sæ driuen;
> and the leo i þan ulode iwende wið me seolue
> þa wit i sæ comen þa vðen me hire binomen
> com þer an fisc lið and fereden me to londe.
> Þa wes ich al wet and weri of sor3en and seoc. (14009-15)
>
> The lion came running towards me and seized me by the waist, and made off, moving towards the sea. And I saw the sea-waves surging; and the lion went with me into the water. Once we two were in the sea the waves parted us; then a fish came swimming by and bore me to the land. I was all wet and weary then, sick with sorrow.

As with the hill but even more so, the problem here is not that the lion, the fish and the sea symbolise too little but too much. This is of course how pseudo-prophecy works, being suggestive but vague in order to admit of favourable interpretation whatever befall. What makes this episode more interesting than such run-of-the-mill hokum is the fact that La3amon retains or even adds

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[164] 'He bigon to hewene hardliche swiðe / and ða postes forheou alle þa heolden up þa halle'; 'He began to hew with great vigour and cut through all the posts which supported the hall', 13991-2.
[165] Sometimes La3amon's love of prophesy leads him to 'fulfil' a prophetic hint, such as when he makes Arthur destroy Winchester (14195-202), on the basis of a passage from the Prophecies of Merlin (see Barron and Weinberg, p. 279). The fact that he chooses to fulfil *this* prophecy in *this* way, however, may mean that he is seeks to intensify the brutality or tragedy of Arthur's fall.

elements in the remaining Arthurian passages of his poem to which the vision of the sea could relate. There is the landing of Arthur's army, where they are met by Mordred's army and a fierce battle ensues in which Gawain is killed: is he the lion separated from Arthur in the sea? Or is this the battle at which Arthur's own nature as victorious king is swept away? If neither, then should we connect this image with the curious detail, not found before La3amon, of Wenheuer's death:

> Þa nusten men of þere queen war heo bicumen weore,
> no feole 3ere seoððe nuste hit mon to soðe
> whaðer heo weore on deðe .....
> þa heo hireseolf weore isunken in þa watere. (14213-6)
>
> It was not then known what had become of the queen, nor for many years thereafter was it truly known whether she was dead ... when she was herself submerged in the water.

No surviving text that La3amon could have used as a source here mentions any doubt about Guinevere's fate, Geoffrey and Wace both placing her in a nunnery at the end of the tale. Even if the half-line (or more) were not missing from this passage, it would still be enigmatic. Both Rosamund Allen and Barron and Weinberg take 'isunken in þa watere' as an idiom meaning 'disappeared without trace.'[167] There is good reason for this conclusion, but even if it is so, I submit that it is also important that La3amon uses *this* idiom in *this* connection. Even if only in a figure of speech, Guinevere disappears not into caves, or skies, or mist, or hills, but into *water*.

This reference (possibly) to death by water is only made the more intriguing by the powerful landscape image that La3amon has inserted into his

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[166] See for example *Beowulf*, ed. Frederick Klaeber, 3rd edn (Boston, 1941), lines 710-11.
[167] See Lawman, *Brut*, trans. Rosamund Allen (London, 1992), p. 461; Barron and Weinberg, *La3amon's Arthur*, note to line 14216.

text but two hundred lines earlier. The two are, of course, not explicitly linked, but the recurrence of watery imagery through these passages at the end of Arthur's part of the Brut seems to invite us to apply the prophecy in varying ways. This is all the more intriguing since, as Rosamund Allen notes in her translation, in the passage of the dream the MS has 'leo', a masculine lion, but refers to it with the feminine pronoun 'hire', her.[168] Once more, the ambiguity is deliberate to help in evasive application, and it allows readers to wonder whether Guinevere is the lioness, lost to Arthur through water.

The use of watery imagery shows La3amon's mastery of such details, and his acute ability to use images of landscape to make references and link ideas across his text. The landscape is never tied to one idea or person, but recurs with tantalising hints at connections with different people or ideas. This encourages an active interpretation of the text, where we as audience are called upon to fill in the gaps, but it is landscape that provides the apparatus to make that invitation.

Conclusion

Kenneth J. Tiller has drawn attention to the ways in which land, landscape and naming are key for La3amon's understanding of the processes he writes about and their relation to his own present:

> La3amon's conception of historiographic translation involves the translation of landscape, as the conquest of territory becomes a trope for the historian-translator's 'conquest' of text. New rulers establish new boundaries [...] These changes to the

[168] *Brut*, trans. Allen, p. 460.

> physical landscape – new construction, including castles and churches, along with new boundary divisions – have the effect of permanently altering the landscape itself.[169]

Tiller's interest is in the role of landscape in La3amon's ideology, reading the poem in terms of post-colonial theories of language, appropriation and history; my interest is in the ways in which the *Brut* and the other texts examined in this chapter use landscape to interact with events, commenting on them and suggesting how they ought to be interpreted. Yet his approach is useful here in highlighting the elementary fact that almost all of the battles of Arthur, and indeed the other battles in the *Brut*, are about winning control of land from one's enemies. Stories of battles like this can arise and flourish under many circumstances, but it is significant that in England this one did so strongly in the first one hundred and fifty years or so of Norman monarchy, a period during which the new ruling classes were establishing their control and legitimacy in the territories which form the subject of the Arthur story.

The stories of Arthur were powerfully appropriate in this context, and writers such as Geoffrey, Wace and La3amon were acutely aware of the resonances between written history and contemporary political reality. Nevertheless, their texts rarely offer comment or interpretation, but focus chiefly on narrative. It is therefore in examining the details of what happens and, as I have demonstrated here, where it happens, that we can begin to recover their habits of thought and opinions on the questions of history, politics and textuality that Arthur's rise and fall obliquely addresses.

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[169] Tiller, *Anglo-Norman Vision*, p. 127. For a contrasting perceptive insight at the importance of land in La3amon, see Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 50-81.

Chapter 4

In Place of Strife - Landscapes And Setting In Middle English Debate Poetry

The debate poem seems one of the characteristic literary creations of the Middle Ages, as typically medieval as King Arthur or a saint's *vita*. Yet for each of these three examples of what is meant by 'medieval', some qualification is necessary. Arthur has flourished and been retold across the world in the post-medieval era, in styles and media that could hardly have been imagined by Geoffrey of Monmouth or Chrétien de Troyes. The hagiographical mode can be found in Europe not only after the Middle Ages (its influence can be felt from John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* through to twenty-first century Christian biographies), but before (for example in the Acts of the Apostles, to say nothing of non- or pre-Christian examples). In contrast to these two kinds of writing, the debate poem emerges fully only in the medieval period, and flowers but also largely dies therein. There is, as I shall discuss below, some evidence of a debate poem tradition in the Classical period, but different in style and perhaps purpose from that found in the Middle Ages.[170] One scholar traces the history of the convention as follows:

> [Debate poetry] came into being during the Carolingian Revival; it grew in popularity among the Latin writings of European churchmen between the ninth and twelfth centuries; and it flourished subsequently between 1200 and 1500 in most of the European vernacular literatures.[171]

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[170] See Betty Nye Hedberg, 'The *Bucolics* and Medieval Poetic Debate', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 75 (1944), 47-67.

[171] J.W. Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology* (Woodbridge, 1991), p. xii. The masterpiece of scholarship in this field is Hans Walther, *Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, Bd. 5, Heft 5 (München, 1920).

This analysis strongly identifies the rise and fall of the debate poem with that of the Middle Ages (understood for the purposes of the present thesis to be identical with the Old and Middle English linguistic periods, roughly 500-1500AD). Even granted the presence of a debate poem tradition in the pre-medieval period, the fact that the convention proved so popular within the Middle Ages, and that this popularity seems to decline sharply with the beginning of the early modern era, marks the debate poem form out as being in some sense typical or symptomatic of thought and aesthetics in the Middle Ages. This makes debate poems particularly apt as objects of the present study, concerned as it is to examine a mode or modes of thought about landscape and writing that were characteristic of the period. In this chapter I shall endeavour to show the ways in which landscape provides clues that help the audience understand debate poems. Some of these clues would have been significant (if sometimes subliminally) for a contemporary audience; that is to say they would have guided an audience response when these poems were read or heard in the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Other clues can help scholars to understand the genesis of the debate poem as a convention, and show the ways in which it interacted with other conventions over time.

Origins of debate poetry: Alcuin and Classical Eclogue

Landscape is one of the factors that links the texts in the debate poem tradition with their pre-medieval poetic ancestry. When talking of debate poems, 'convention', 'tradition' or 'discourse' are more appropriate terms than 'genre', since this last suggests something far more rigid than the others, and those poems that can (and have) justifiably been classified by scholars as debates are

remarkably varied in style, tone, form and subject matter. The notion of a debate poem (or, as I shall discuss later, a dream vision, to take only one other example) provides the poet with topoi rather than rules.

However, the flexible nature of the convention can lead to difficulties in defining what exactly is and is not a debate poem. This need not be a problem when discussing the poems of the Middle Ages (or any other period) themselves, since the language of 'convention', 'tradition' or 'discourse', outlined above, can be used to refer to the porous phenomenon of debate poetry, acknowledging that some texts may be more thoroughly or exclusively debate poems than others. It is more of a problem when trying to discern the origins of this convention/tradition/discourse, since it then becomes important to decide whether a posited antecedent is a debate or not, or shares some features with debates, which in turn will require agreement over which medieval poems are debates and which are not. For these and other reasons, the origins of the debate poem have themselves been a matter of debate amongst scholars. In what follows, I shall argue that an examination of landscape can act as a useful starting point enabling us to see the inter-relatedness of texts within, without and on the margins of the debate poem tradition.

The text generally agreed be the earliest example of debate poetry in the Middle Ages is the *Conflictus Veris et Hiemis*, a poem of the Carolingian renaissance, attributed to Alcuin.[172] In the *Conflictus*, the personified figures of Spring and Winter debate whether the cuckoo should be allowed to come, since

she heralds the end of Winter and the beginning of Spring. This discussion inevitably turns to the relative merits of the two seasons, and is resolved only when the shepherds who are to act as judge give their verdict in favour of Spring, and the cuckoo is allowed to sing.

As I shall show, there are several elements here that were to prove highly influential in the subsequent framing and development of debate poetry in the High and Late Middle Ages. Yet if this was the first medieval debate poem, it was not without literary antecedents of other kinds, as has already been hinted at. Under Alcuin's direction, Carolingian literary culture was profoundly influenced by the writings of the past, and it is therefore inherently plausible that any innovation of Alcuin's would draw its inspiration from Latin Classical literature.[173] J.H. Hanford (drawing on the work of several previous scholars) has provided the most detailed argument that Virgil's *Eclogues* be seen as the forbears of the medieval debate poems.[174] Like others before him, Hanford was concerned with the Latin debate poems of the Middle Ages, rather than with the vernacular texts which are my chief object of study here. I therefore want not only to register my agreement with Hanford's conclusion that the eclogue was a major influence on the medieval debates, but also to show that this is true of the vernacular poems as much as it is of the Latin ones. Moreover, I will argue that landscape, whilst not used identically in the debate and the eclogue, nevertheless

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[172] See *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. E. Duemmler et al., 4 vols. (Berlin, 1881 onwards) I 270-2. Translations of this text are mine.

[173] Alcuin's debt to the Classical past can be seen amongst other things in his use of Virgil as model for his theories regarding Charlemagne's status and role, and the influence of Cicero on his own *Rhetoric*. See Luitpold Wallach, *Alcuin and Charlemagne: Studies in Carolingian History and Literature* (New York, 1959), pp. 20-1 (Virgil) and pp. 94-5 (Cicero).

[174] J. H. Hanford, 'Classical Eclogue and Medieval Debate', *Romanic Review* 2 (1911), 16-31 and 129-43. For an impressive bibliography on attempts to link Classical eclogue and Medieval debate, see Hedberg, *Bucolics*, p. 48.

provides evidence of this lineage and development. I shall first need briefly to analyse those features of eclogue which were influential on vernacular debates.

The eclogue was a Greek (rather than Roman) invention, and Virgil's contributions to the genre, which would become the model for many subsequent poets, were themselves imitations of those of the Greek poet Theocritus.[175] However, since medieval Western Europe was a Latin- rather than Greek-speaking literary culture, and since for medieval audiences the *Aeneid* established Virgil's authority over almost every other secular poet, it was his eclogues who represented the genre to the Middle Ages.

The constituent elements of the eclogue genre are easy to identify.[176] The setting is rural, specifically pastoral, the speakers male shepherds, goatherds or cowherds and usually two in number (there are exceptions: Virgil's Second and Fourth Eclogues each have only one speaker).[177] The eclogue is represented as taking place at a point where these men are resting from their labours, and talking to one another. The subject of their conversation may vary, but it is generally concerned with their own lives or work. However, a large part of the purpose and charm of the eclogue is its capacity not only for idealising rural life, but also for commenting on wider political, moral or social events and ideas, and

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[175] For text and translation, see *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, ed. J.M. Edmonds (London, 1916), pp. 8-361.

[176] I follow scholars such as Hanford in taking Virgil's eclogues as the epitome of the genre, at least for the medieval point of view.

[177] The concept of 'pastoral' has received a lot of scholarly attention. Paul Alpers *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago, 1996) makes some perceptive comments on the tradition of pastoral in Classical Latin poetry, but he is concerned mostly with examples from the sixteenth century forwards, and ignores the medieval period. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935) achieves more in less space, but has little to say about the medieval period (Chaucer and Dante merit three mentions between them). Better than either, for my current purposes, is Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval Into Renaissance* (Ipswich, 1977).

thus the conversation is frequently a more-or-less thinly veiled commentary on the poets' own time and concerns. The symbolic aspect of the eclogue acts as a means for displaying the poet's entertaining skill and artistry, inviting and allowing the audience to 'read through' the surface meaning of the text (the pleasure of the puzzle) and to see a contemporary issue that might otherwise be familiar or even trite by unexpected and fresh means (the pleasure of novelty and surprise). Thus Virgil's Fourth Eclogue is placed within a series of idyllic pastoral poems, yet celebrates the birth of both a new golden age and a specific child of high birth and political power.[178] If the poem begins by questioning the use of a rural setting when hymning figures of high state (*non omnis arbusta iuvant humilesque myricae*; 'Not all do the orchards please and the lowly tamarisks'), it immediately insists on staying in the countryside, and obliquely asserts that such pastoral modes can be entirely fitting for this subject matter (*si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae*; 'If our song is of the woodland, let the woodland be worthy of a consul').

Speaking through the framing device and veil of the rural idyll also somewhat diffuses any potential controversy that might attend the discussion of sensitive political matters.[179] Thus it has been argued that Virgil's First and Ninth Eclogues are a coded celebration of the poet's successful appeal against the confiscation of his farm, a tactful way of marking this landmark in the poet's

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[178] See Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge Mass., 1935), pp. 28-9, fn. 2, and 576-8. All quotations from Virgil's *Eclogues* (including English translation) are taken from this edition.

[179] This political use of the eclogue genre continued into the early modern period, and poets such as Alexander Barclay, writing his *Eclogues* in 1513-14 (see *The Eclogues of Alexander Barclay*, ed. Beatrice White, EETS OS 175 (1928).

career, without re-opening the debate or offending the authorities.[180] Political subjects recur throughout the rest of the *Eclogues*: the Fifth seems to have been written in praise of Julius Caesar;[181] and the Eighth is dedicated to the consul Pollio, and celebrates his return from war.[182] This ability to talk of two things at once was also attractive to medieval poets,[183] and the use of the pastoral personae of eclogues was a disarming device to distance the poet from the speaker in the poem. As I shall argue below, when the eclogue gave birth to the debate this aspect of the tradition was preserved. Debate poems would repeatedly invite audiences to consider ideas and arguments beyond their surface meanings, and the debate poem was frequently the form chosen by poets seeking to explore, advocate or satirise contemporary political concerns.

I have said that the setting for an eclogue is rural, specifically pastoral. The details of this setting now need to be examined in more detail. Virgil occasionally provides a concrete location in the form of a place-name, but these are often in relation to reported events, rather than indications of where the speakers are at the moment of the poem.[184] More telling (and more significant from the point of view of the debate poem) are the typical gestures towards landscape features in the *Eclogues*.

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[180] This interpretation has been generally agreed with regard to the Ninth Eclogue, but is less certainly true of the First; see Fairclough's comments in Virgil, *Eclogues*, p. 3 fn. 1, p. 65 fn. 1, and pp. 575-6.
[181] Virgil, *Eclogues*, pp. 34-5, fn. 1.
[182] Virgil, *Eclogues*, p. 55, fn. 3.
[183] The classic exposition of this fact is of course found in C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 44-111, but see also Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto, 2004); Ann R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Woodbridge, 2003); Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff, 2003); and J. Stephen Russell, ed., *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1988).
[184] Examples of this include Rome (I.19); Africa, Scythia, Crete and Britain (I.64-6); Troy (IV.36).

The first of these that must be noted is the seeking of shade, and consequently the trees that provide it. This topos is apparent from the first line of the First Eclogue, where Tityrus is addressed *patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi* and *lentus in umbra* ('You [...] lie under your spreading beech's covert', 'at ease beneath the shade', *Eclogues* I.1 and I.4). The opening lines of the Fourth Eclogue, which have already been quoted above in part, make repeated reference to trees and woodland, and in the first speech of the Fifth Eclogue, Menalcus asks *Cur non* [...] *hic corylis mixtas inter consedimus ulmos?* ('why not seat us among these elms, with hazels interspersed?', *Eclogues* V.1-3). The Sixth Eclogue returns to the *apologia rustica* of the Fourth, declaring that *prima Syracosio dignata est ludere versu / nostra nec erubuit silvas habitare Thalia* ('My Muse first deigned to sport in Sicilian strains, and blushed not to dwell in the woods', *Eclogues* VI.1-2), but asserting that it is these very woods that will become the means to honour the poem's addressee: *te nostrae, Vare, myricae, / te nemus omne canet* (' 'tis of thee, Varus, our tamarisks shall sing, of thee all our groves', *Eclogues* VI.10-11). The Seventh Eclogue begins with Meliboeus recounting an incident in which he joined Daphnis under an oak tree; and the idea of shade is emphasised almost excessively in the closing lines (but one) of the last Eclogue: *solemus: solet esse gravis cantantibus umbra, / iuniperi gravis umbra, nocent et frugibus umbrae* ('Let us rise; the shade oft brings peril to singers. The juniper's shade brings peril; hurtful to the corn, too, is the shade', *Eclogues*, X.75-6).

The reason for the recurrence of these linked ideas of trees and shade is obvious: for the shepherds to be talking (and thus making the poem), they have to be resting from their work, and so will take the chance to shelter from the noonday Mediterranean sun. Yet this common-sense explanation is only part of the story, since the gesture of seeking shade becomes a characteristic motif of the genre, and is consciously included in eclogues as such. Furthermore, the same gesture is also sometimes deliberately placed in eclogue narratives in ways that suggest more on the part of the protagonist than simply a desire to get out of the sun. For example, in Virgil's Second Eclogue, Corydon comes *inter densas, umbrosa cacumina, fagos* ('among the thick beeches with their shady summits', *Eclogues*, II.3) to sing of his hopeless love.[185] Given his circumstances, the setting seems to reflect a desire for secrecy on the shepherd's part. Here the act of seeking shade is given an emotional motivation, rather than (or in addition to) a practical one. It was this emotional significance of the forest, seeking shade, and the movement between open and wooded areas that was particularly picked up by medieval poets in their debate poetry.

Poets writing in admiring imitation of Virgil copied such details closely. One poet who did so was Calpurnius Siculus.[186] In the first of his *Eclogues*, he has Corydon remark to Ornytus that the cattle they are tending have taken refuge

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[185] This aspect of pastoral was very fruitful in the Middle Ages: obvious examples would include Arcite in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (I.1497-1573) and Boccacio's *Eclogues* (trans. Janet Levarie Smarr (New York, 1987)).

[186] Little is known of who the poet was, beyond the fact that he seems to have flourished under Nero, with references in the *Eclogues* to contemporary events of the 50s AD (J.W. Duff and A.M. Duff (eds), *Minor Latin Poets* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 209-12). Of the two best manuscripts of the *Eclogues*, one is from the end of the fourteenth century and the other from the fifteenth century. However, the texts must have been known and read to some extent in the high Middle Ages, since there is a twelfth century manuscript containing the first three Eclogues and part of the Fourth, and extracts from the whole set are found in *florilegia* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Duff and Duff, *Minor Latin Poets*, pp. 216-17).

from the sun, suggesting that they do likewise.[187] In the Second Eclogue, Astacus and Idas meet under the same shades:

> *hi cum terras gravis ureret aestas,*
> *ad gelidos fontes et easdem forte sub umbras*
> *conveniunt* [...] ll. 4-6
>
> These, upon a day when oppressive summer scorched the earth, met by a cooling spring – as it chanced, beneath the same shady tree [...] [pp. 226-7]

These consistencies of setting between Virgil's *Eclogues* and (as we shall see) medieval debate poems are all the more significant, since it is a singing contest or contention that forms the main substance of the poem. These elements of landscape and contest recur in the other eclogues of Calpurnius. There are references to seeking shade beneath the trees in all but one of the remaining *Eclogues*, usually in the second line.[188] There are also indications of debate form, not simply in the dialogic exchange of speeches between characters in all but one of the poems,[189] but also in references to contests of one form or another. More striking even than the rivalry in love described in the Third, and the rivalry in song between brothers in the Fourth, is the double contest in the Seventh. The opening exchanges between Lycotas and Corydon speak of the *tenero haedo* won by Stimicon for his singing. Corydon responds saying that Stimicon can keep the 'tender kid' and all the herds of the country, since he has seen and been captivated by the new wonders in Rome. Thus the singing contest traditionally appropriate to the eclogue is cast aside, and a new contest, town/country or

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[187] *nos quoque vicinis cur non succedimus umbris?*, 'Why do not we also make for the neighbouring shade?' (Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogue I.6, in Duff and Duff, *Minor Latin Poets*, p. 218. All quotations from Calpurnius in the present essay are taken from this edition.)

[188] See III.14-17, IV.2, V.2, VI.2.

[189] The exception is the Fifth Eclogue, but this is conceived as an address from the elderly Micon to his foster-son, and thus prefigures the didactic use that will later be made of debate forms.

innovation/tradition is set up in its place. This reinforces the association of eclogue with debate, but also widens the possible range of subjects for such debate.

A second (although less obvious) temporal-spatial idea which recurs in the eclogue is the transience or fragility of the idyllic setting in which the poem takes place. The space it occupies is repeatedly under threat, or needs to be left behind. So, for example, in that same Second Eclogue of Calpurnius, the poem moves with improbable speed from the full heat of a summer day, with more than a hint that it is too hot to work, to night: *sed fugit ecce dies revocatque crepuscula vesper*, 'but lo! the day departs and evening brings the gloaming back' (II.93). The very trees that had provided the shade which made the singing contest possible now force it to end: *iam resonant frondes, iam cantibus obstrepit arbos*, 'Now are the leaves a-rustling; now the forest drowns our song' (II.95). In the narrative of this poem, an important link between pre-Christian eclogue and medieval debates, landscape, along with weather, dictates when the action begins and ends, but also indicates mood. The changing character projected onto the trees (first providing shade and then rustling in the evening breeze) is a way of suggesting the changing moods of the human figures within the poem.

Thus whilst the mentioning of a need to leave which occurs at the end of many eclogues is in part a structural device, providing a reason for the poet to draw the poem to an end, it also provides thematic or atmospheric effects. Time spent in eclogue is stolen from more pressing concerns: the atmosphere may be one of holiday, but holidays always have to end with a return to normal life. The

political allusions are one example of the ways in which the more serious world outside the eclogue can intrude upon it; the need to leave at the end of the poem is a spatial indicator of the transient nature of the respite given by the world it creates.

However potent the influence of eclogue, it was not the only genre that contributed to the development of debate poems. In an important response to Hanford's analysis, B.N. Hedberg argued that it is misleading to view the pastoral tradition represented by Virgil (but including poets such as Calpurnius) as the sole antecedent for medieval debate poems. Hedberg pointed to evidence of debate poems already extant in the Classical period, and argues that they too helped to form the medieval notion of debate poetry.[190] The evidence she adduces is important, but not entirely convincing. A number of the poems she mentions are now lost, only mentioned in the writings of others such as Quintilian and Nonius. It would be unwise to base to firm a conclusion on reports of texts that can no longer be examined themselves, and that do not appear to have been disseminated in the medieval period.

Other poems quoted by Hedberg as examples of debate certainly feature a contention between two characters, often personifications or representations of something beyond themselves. To this extent, they have strong affinities with the debate genre as it flourished in the Middle Ages. Again, however, we must exercise caution, since Hedberg herself admits that '[t]hese ancient debates are

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[190] Hedberg, '*Bucolics*'.

not likely to have been widely known to mediaeval writers'.[191] though it is possible to suppose that the extant debate poems from the classical era, and hints of others that have been lost, are fragments of a larger tradition, and that it was the tradition, not the surviving poems, which were known to Alcuin and those who followed his example.

However, the real problem with Hedberg's argument is that the texts she calls 'classical examples of pure debate'[192] are either no such thing, or so different in feel and style from their equivalents in the medieval period that they cannot in themselves account for the later tradition. One example given by Hedberg is the debate during the trial scene in the *Orestes* of Dracontius. Whatever formal elements this work has in common with medieval debate, the major difference is immediately obvious: the debate portion is contained inside a larger work. To be sure, this does happen in the Middle Ages too (the second surviving debate from the Carolingian corpus is 'embedded in the eclogue of Ermoldus Nigellus' as Hedberg puts it [p. 48]), but it is by no means the characteristic form of debate in the later period. Any theory of the origin of the medieval debate needs to account not just for its content but also for its form, and analogues which contain debates but do not have the debate as their *raison d'être* are only partial evidence for the origins of the medieval tradition. Several of Hedberg's examples fall into this category of embedded rather than pure debates, and this weakens her argument considerably. The object of study here is the debate as a poem in its own right, not excerpts from other poems in which the activity of debating takes place.

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[191] Hedberg, '*Bucolics*', p. 53.

Hedberg's argument is on much stronger ground in showing the number of other forms of poem where debate activity takes place. A notable example is the *Satires* of Horace, a text much more familiar to the Middle Ages.[193] Moreover, it seems highly plausible that the rhetorical culture of the Classical period exerted a major influence on the rise of debate literature. Yet this need not have happened, or not have happened primarily, through the mediation of Classical debate poems. The use of formal rhetorical techniques was, as has already been described in chapter 1 of this thesis, a large part of high medieval culture, particularly with the rise of the schools and universities from the twelfth century onwards. These techniques and methods of teaching, debate and argumentation were heavily indebted to just such Classical authors as Hedberg mentions in connection with a Classical tradition of debate poems. It is this influence, on the scholastic culture of the poets who would write the debate poems, which is the more significant connection between the rhetors of antiquity and the poets of the Middle Ages.

It therefore seems that whilst Hedberg has added much valuable evidence to our understanding of the ways in which debate poetry evolved, the classical eclogue remains the crucial source of inspiration. In fact, Hedberg's most valuable insight is that in the *Conflictus* Alcuin actually joined two conventions (at least) into one.[194] His melding of the pastoral eclogue and the debate may have been suggested by the amoebæan aspects of some of the eclogues that influenced him, in which the speakers take turns to exchange remarks.

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[192] Hedberg, '*Bucolics*', p. 53.

Nevertheless, Alcuin's *Conflictus* is a genuine synthesis of traditions. As a result, we should expect to find (in varying degrees) two worlds at once in the debate poems of the Middle Ages: high literary culture and pastoral simplicity, the rhetorical wit and intelligence of the schoolroom and the rural idyll.

Medieval English Debate Poems

In line with my focus elsewhere in this thesis, my chief object of study for the remainder of this chapter will be the debate poems of the Middle English period, but such an analysis would be incomplete without a brief discussion of poems in Old English. Although the surviving corpus of Old English poetry tends more towards narrative, gnomic, elegiac or didactic modes, it does include some examples of debate, but fewer than might at first appear. The poems known as *Soul and Body I & II* are not debates, since the only speakers within the poems are the narrator and the Soul, and no counter-arguments are raised by the Body in opposition.[195] They merit mention here, not for being debates, nor for landscape reasons (there is no landscape in the poems), but rather because the subject matter (the Soul's revulsion of the Body and the latter's corruption) whilst not original, did resurface in later poems, some of which are true debates. I shall discuss these later.

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[193] See Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 100-101.
[194] Hedberg, '*Bucolics*', p. 61.
[195] *Soul and Body I* is from the Vercelli Book, fol. 101b-103b (text in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records II (New York, 1932), pp. 54-9); *Soul and Body II* is found in The Exeter Book, fol. 98a-100a (text in *The Exeter Book*, eds George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III (New York, 1936), pp. 174-8). In spite of major differences between these two texts (each includes lines that the other does not), they are recognisably two versions of the same poem (see Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, p. lii).

The poem now known as *Christ and Satan* does include passages of debate, most notably between the two eponymous protagonists in lines 665-709, but also briefly between Satan and the other damned angels in hell, at lines 34-66.[196] Yet once again, it will be seen even from these line-numbers that debate forms only a part (a little over a tenth) of the overall poem, rather than being its whole form and purpose.[197] The main debate passage is a creative paraphrase of an existing debate from the Bible, and whilst these sections of the gospels may have had an indirect influence on the emergence of the debate poem tradition, the gospels themselves could not be described as debates in any conventional sense. This highlights the difference between the medieval debate poems and those poems cited by Hedberg as examples of a Classical debate tradition.

The only true debate poem in Old English is *Solomon and Saturn*, which exists in fragmentary form in two manuscripts, CCCC MS 422, pp. 1-6 and 13-26; and CCCC MS 41, pp. 196-8.[198] This enigmatic work, which may in fact be two separate poems, contains many points of interest, but none with regard to landscape. Several place names are mentioned (in lines 3-4 and 186-201), but only as examples of the places to which Saturn has travelled seeking wisdom, before finding it in the present dialogue with Solomon. There is thus no reason on landscape grounds to link this poem with either the eclogues of the past or the medieval debate poems of the future. Indeed, its interrogatory (rather than

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[196] The poem is in Oxford, Bodleian MS Junius 11, pp. 213-29 (text in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George Philip Krapp, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records I (New York, 1931), pp. 135-58).
[197] Debate may once have taken up more of the poem, since a passage appears to be missing between lines 674 and 675: see S.A.J. Bradley, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1997), p. 103. Even if this is so, the missing section, dealing with Satan's temptation to Christ to throw himself off the Temple and prove his power, is unlikely to have been long enough to change the balance of the poem.

adversarial) nature marks it out as being less akin to debate poems than to the *Vafþrúðnismál* literature in Old Norse.[199]

These three poems, although certainly sharing some of the features of the later debate poem tradition, are therefore related to it as cousins rather than forefathers. Moreover, the paucity of landscape reference within them means that they need detain us no longer, and we may proceed to post-Conquest England, and the first great flowering of the debate tradition in English vernacular literature.

There is no better place to begin analysing the Middle English debate poems than with *The Owl and The Nightingale* (henceforward *O&N*). It is one of the finest, longest (at 1794 lines), and earliest English debate poems[200] and, in spite of all that has been said above about the ancestry of the debate form, its emergence as such a complete work of art in a comparatively new convention is remarkable. Given this, it is unsurprising that the poem has received a good deal of scholarly attention; rather more surprising is the extent to which scholars have differed in their understanding of such basic issues as why the poem was written

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[198] For a full description of the manuscripts, see *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records VI (New York, 1942), pp. l-lx. The text itself is edited on pp. 31-48 of the same volume.

[199] On this connection, see Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, p. lv.

[200] It was probably written between the death of Henry II (1189) and the accession of Henry III (1216), as argued by Eric G. Stanley, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (London, 1960), p. 19. Recent scholars such as Neil Cartlidge have begun to raise the possibility that it was actually written after the death of Henry III (1272), which would make its sophistication slightly more understandable, but it is still remarkably accomplished for a poem written in English at this period. See, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Text and Translation*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Exeter, 2001), p. XV.

and what it is about.[201] In trying to interpret the poet's use of landscape within a poem that is apparently easy to misinterpret, I shall have to exercise caution with regard to a number of issues, of which one of the most important is voice. Apart from the wren and other birds that enter in the closing passages, there are three voices in this poem: the Owl; the Nightingale; and the narrator. If we fail to remember this fact then we are bound to interpret individual lines incorrectly. So, for example, some critics have drawn attention to the inclusion in the poem of behaviour that we know to have no parallel in real life. Neil Cartlidge points out that owls do not lay their eggs in other birds' nests, as is alleged at lines 101-26;[202] we might also add that nightingales do not uniformly choose to live near privies (cf. 592). Yet we cannot automatically assume that the opinions and ideas the poet gives to his two protagonists have an objective validity. The two birds are not mouthpieces for the poet's own opinions but figures designed to be comically argumentative, and their mutual allegations of unnatural behaviour have no status as objective fact, but are levelled as accusations by each bird against her opponent. We must treat all such accusations in the poem with some caution, since almost the only constant in the birds' argumentation is their readiness to seize on anything that appears to offer them an advantage in disputation, regardless of whether it is true, logical, or consistent with their own points expressed elsewhere, let alone with the thinking of the poet. We should not, therefore, look to these passages for evidence of a consistent use of

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[201] For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, and a resounding rebuttal of some of the more absurd readings, see Kathryn Hume, *The Owl and the Nightingale: The Poem and its Critics* (Toronto, 1975).

[202] Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 46; but see S. d'Ardenne, 'Maitre Nicole de Guildford, *In Preost on Leoden*', *Revue des Langues Vivantes* 39 (1973), 400-408, at 403, who quotes *The New Dictionary of Birds* by A.L. Thompson (1964) as saying 'with minor exceptions, owls hardly make any nests themselves; instead they use other birds [sic] nests, such as those of crows [...] and birds-of-prey'. All quotations from *O&N* are taken from Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*.

landscape and setting by the poet in order to reinforce his ideas. Rather, it is those lines that come in the narrator's voice that will be the focus of my analysis.[203]

The skilful manipulation of landscape is not least among the marks of high artistry that this poem displays. The opening lines establish the setting succinctly:

> Ich was in one sumere dale
> In one suþe di$_3$ele hale [...]
> Þe Ni$_3$tingale bigon þe speche,
> In one hurne of one breche;
> & sat up one vaire bo$_3$e,
> Þar were abute blosme ino$_3$e,
> In ore vaste þicke hegge,
> Imeind mid spire & grene segge [...]
> Þo stod on old stoc þarbiside,
> Þar þo Vle song hire tide;
> & was mid iui al bigrowe:
> Hit was þare Hule eardingstowe. (1-2, 13-18, 25-28)
>
> I was in a summer valley, in a very secluded nook [...] The Nightingale began the talk, in the corner of an area of cleared land, and sat upon a fair bough, around which were many blossoms, in a large thick hedge, mingled with reeds and green sedge [...] There stood an old stump nearby where the Owl sang her tale; and it was all overgrown with ivy: it was the Owl's dwelling-place.

Much of the artistry in these early lines lies in the fact that individual words can and do perform several functions at once. This ability to employ words, ideas and motifs in such a way that each one suggests many things simultaneously is one sign of the poet's skill, evident throughout *O&N*. It is especially appropriate here at the very opening of the poem, as it enables him to provide the greatest possible number of hints as to what will follow and how it should be read. Some of these hints may be contradictory, and this in itself intrigues an audience.

Numbers in quotations from the poem refer to lines; numbers in quotations from editorial material refer to pages.

drawing them on to the rest of the poem. I shall attempt to tease out the denotations and connotations of these opening lines, by examining them from the viewpoints of a variety of possible functions that the landscape might serve.

Certainly, the landscape in which the poet places his two avian protagonists meets the demands of natural verisimilitude. Critics have noted that the nightingale's choice of a hedge on the edge of a wood (amidst plants that suggest plentiful water nearby) is ornithologically plausible, as is the owl's preference for an isolated tree.[204] To this extent, then, the landscape is simply what one would expect for the events of the poem to take place. An audience will accept that birds can speak, because this is poetry, and because birds are especially talkative in poetry of the period;[205] they will not accept it so readily if the birds are talking at the bottom of the ocean. Yet details that are true to nature do not in themselves mean that the setting is intended to be merely naturalistic. On the contrary, landscape, just like anything else expressed in language, can be and mean several things at once; indeed, the more a piece of writing realises and exploits this fact, the more literary we judge it to be. Moreover, if a setting is unrealistic, its very oddity may be designed to prompt an audience to see it as symbolic, but realistic landscape is just as capable of conveying symbolic meaning, but more subtly. Lastly, many of the patterns of animal behaviour that were widely taken up for symbolical interpretation in the Middle Ages were

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[203] The narrator is, of course, not by any means identical with the poet, but in a poem such as this the narratorial voice is much closer to objectivity than either of the birds. The important issue here is that the narrator is *presented* as objective, not whether or not he is actually objective.
[204] Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 46.
[205] Chaucer provides numerous examples, most obviously in *The Parlement of Foules* but also in *The Squire's Tale*, V.472ff, where the falcon speaks to Canacee 'in hir haukes ledene' (V.478).

derived from observation of the real world.[206] The presence of credible details of setting in itself does not mean that they are only there for naturalistic reasons. Rather, the key issue is the use that the poem makes of them and how it encourages us to interpret them.

The symbolic aspects of landscape in these lines are best understood when placed in the context of other poems from a similar period, which share ideas with this passage. This enables us to see clearly what has been retained and what changed from the models available to the poet, since a large part of the point of the passage is its playful engagement with other conventions. Its symbolic dimension is therefore also a generic one. These virtuosic riffs on gestures incorporated from different genres are appropriate and highly effective at a point when debate poems are a comparatively new phenomenon, and expectations of what a debate poem is like are still in the process of being formed. They also show the ambitious way in which this poem expands and explodes the hitherto small-scale boundaries of the fledgling debate form.

The 'sumere dale' of the first line has been interpreted by critics as evoking the love poems of the *chanson d'aventure* tradition, and its sub-genre of *pastourelle*.[207] As Cartlidge points out, this sets up a potentially comic contrast between, on the one hand, the amatory expectations of readers of those types of poem and, on the other, the bitter personal abuse that will characterise the debate

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[206] '[T]he bestiary was a compilation of accumulated folk-lore, legend, pseudoscience and rudimentary scientific observation of an assortment of real and imaginary animals'. 'Introduction', in N.C. Flores, ed., *Animals in the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2000), p. x.
[207] So Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 44.

between the two birds.[208] This contrast is made all the more forceful since, as Hume has noted, the vituperation is particularly intense in the birds' opening exchanges, a deliberate tactic designed to set the argumentative and even scabrous tone with some force.[209]

It is not only contemporary poems that have shaped this passage. There are a number of details which suggest a kinship with the *Conflictus Veris et Hiemis* (the influence is presumably indirect, since we cannot assume that the poet of *O&N* had access to Alcuin's poem). The rural setting in both poems is perhaps largely determined by the subject matter, but in both poems the temporal setting also favours the warmer seasons of the year. The subject matter of the *Conflictus* places this poem firmly at that point of the year where Winter gives way to Spring. Therefore, in those poems that in some way descend from Alcuin's poem (including *O&N*) we should not be surprised to see remnants of the Classical pastoral, even if they are derived at second hand from the originals. Regarding *O&N*, J.A.W. Bennett argues 'Blossom hangs on the bough (16), so we must read sumere [...] as meaning spring.'[210] 'Summer' here means the warm seasons of the year, as opposed to winter and autumn. This is underlined by the prominence given in both poems to the function of birds as heralds of the seasons. In the *Conflictus* the entire debate centres on the ability of the cuckoo to inaugurate Spring by her singing. In *O&N*, the debate often returns to the relative merits of each bird's song,[211] and the Nightingale castigates the Owl for singing in winter rather than in summer (415-16). The Owl's response

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[208] Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 44.
[209] Hume, *The Poem and its Critics*, pp. 88-90.
[210] J.A.W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature* (Oxford, 1986), p. 403.
[211] See for example 219-26, 313-22, etc.

reinterprets the worth of singing in each of those seasons, but does not challenge the identification of each bird with particular times of the year (474ff). Just as in the *Conflictus* there is a temporal imperative that suggests Spring will win (the only time of year when Winter and Spring meet is when the former is on the wane and the latter in the ascendant). From this it would follow that, by setting his poem in summer, the poet is suggesting an environment favourable to the Nightingale. In doing so, he is teasing us into thinking, from the beginning, that we know who will win the debate. Certainly, in later debate poems it is made clear from early on who will be victorious.[212]

Against this interpretation, it might be objected that we cannot be sure the poet is hinting either bird will win given that successive readers of the poem have been so divided in their opinions as to which bird is given the advantage.[213] Indeed, many critics have wasted a good deal of time and energy trying to decide whether the poet favours the Owl or the Nightingale, apparently oblivious to the fact that if he really wanted to show a winner he could have done so by providing a resolution to the debate in favour of one or the other. That he does not do so is immensely significant for our reading of the poem, a fact of which Hume was the first to see the real importance.[214] However, the ultimate and quite deliberate lack of a winner does not preclude the poet from dropping hints throughout the poem. He does this not because he wants us to know who is going to win, but because he wants us to think (wrongly) that we do know, and therefore to

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[212] This is the case in *Death and Liffe*, *Winner and Waster*, *Jesus and the Masters of the Laws of the Jews*, *A Disputation between a Christian and a Jew*, and several of the later bird debates. Not all of these titles are authorial, but within the texts themselves the unequal nature of the contests becomes evident from the moment where the participants are introduced.
[213] For a summary see Hume, *The Poem and its Critics*, p. 127.
[214] Hume, *The Poem and its Critics*, pp. 35-50, and 127.

increase our sense of having been fooled at the end, when no resolution is offered. These subtle suggestions of advantage for one or the other bird are part of the process by which the poet entices his audience to give (excessively) serious attention to an impossible debate between two birds, creating what one critic has called a 'shaggy-dog story'.[215] The poet's skill in manipulating his audience in this way is evident from the fact that so many critics have fallen for his trick, apparently without realising it.

Even with this understanding of the poem's methods, a reading that finds in the opening lines evidence to favour the nightingale can only be sustained if 'sumere' refers to the season in which the poem takes place. Some critics have suggested that the word is an inflected form of 'sum' (a certain),[216] but Cartlidge has argued convincingly against this idea,[217] and thus it can only have an attributive sense here. There are differing interpretations of what a 'summer valley' might be, but Dickins and Wilson are in the minority in taking it to mean 'a valley used for summer grazing'.[218] More convincing is Hinckley's 'a valley in [the glory of] summer', backed up by Stanley's 'a valley in summer', which he further notes provides 'the kind of seasonal reference common at the beginning of poems'.[219] This setting, then, seems to establish a potential kinship with

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[215] Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. xxi.
[216] So Atkins and Wrenn, cited by Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 106.
[217] '*sum* does not naturally follow *one*, either in OE or ME. Even if it did, the prepositional ending should be attached to *one*, rather than to *sum*; and since *–ere* is a feminine ending it is unlikely to agree with *dale*, which is derived from the OE neuter *dæl*.' Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 106.
[218] B. Dickins and R.M. Wilson, eds., *Early Middle English Texts* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 183.
[219] H.B. Hinckley, 'Notes on *The Owl and the Nightingale*', *PMLA* 46 (1931), 94; Eric G. Stanley (ed.), *The Owl and the Nightingale* (London, 1960), p. 105.

several poetic traditions, but most tellingly (and with the most complex effects) with that of the debate poem from its earliest medieval origins.[220]

A further kinship between *O&N* and the *Conflictus* emerges from the opening lines of Alcuin's poem. The shepherds come down *de montibus altis* and gather *sub umbra / arborea* ('from the high mountains', 'under the trees' shade'), two details that would seem to provide parallels with the setting of the later poem. Having descended from the mountains, Alcuin's shepherds must presumably be in a valley of some sort, i.e. a 'dale'. Furthermore, there seems to be some kinship between the idea of being under the trees' shade and being in a 'suþe di3ele hale'. These two related motifs (leaving the mountain peaks and seeking shade or seclusion) are likely ultimately to have been derived from Classical Latin pastoral poetry, in which shepherds are often seeking shade.

This can be seen in the *Conflictus*, where the shepherds could hardly be coming down from the mountains into the shade in order to escape the sun's heat (as eclogue tradition would suggest), since we know that the time of year is only the very beginning of Spring; nor is it likely that we are to imagine their descent as coming at the end of a day's pasturing, since this seems an inappropriate time of day for the start of Spring. They descend partly because it is a convention borrowed from pastoral, and partly because a *conflictus* between the seasons is something marvellous, and appropriate to be seen in a secluded natural setting.

The use of a 'dale' may be relevant because of associations between

[220] There are hints that the two birds in the Middle English poem are on the sides of opposing

valleys and conflict through such Biblical models as were discussed in the Chapter 2 of the present thesis. In this case, the invocation of summer may be taken as mitigating the darker associations of 'dale', reassuring the audience that here it is just a valley, and that nothing untoward will follow. Yet the clash of associations in these two words also encapsulates in microcosm the larger contrast already noticed between the generic associations of the seasonal opening (*chanson d'aventure* and *pastourelle*) and the vituperation of the two protagonists which follows.

Some of the ideas associated with valleys in the Bible can be shown to make them even more specifically appropriate as a setting for a debate poem. I have already shown how influential the motif of valley of Jehoshaphat was in medieval literature, not just as a site for the Ascension but also in its role, defined in Joel 3, as the location of the Last Judgement. For this reason, the valley is also referred to in the same chapter as the 'valles concisionis'. 'Concisio' has the sense of destruction but also that of dividing up,[221] which in the context of the prophecy as a whole might be taken to mean the division between those whom God pardons and those whom he condemns. The valley is in fact the setting for judgement between contending parties, just as the 'dale' is in *O&N*. Both valleys are places of division (the two birds divide themselves from each other vociferously) and also of judgement, whether it be given by the other birds, 'Maister Nichole of Guldeforde' or, if we accept the invitation, by us as audience. If the Biblical passage was in the poet's mind when he made his poem, then the ludicrous disparity between these two judgements is yet another

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seasons, the Nightingale in the blossoming bush of spring, the Owl on the stump covered in

example of his comic intentions.[222] If our poet never intended to make any such reference, it is still striking that the situation imagined in the passage from Joel is analogous to the usual state of things in a debate poem: two opposing sides confront each other with a third party placed over them to judge both them and the arguments they represent. Part of the comedy of any comic debate is this awareness of the stupidity of lending such gravity to a trivial matter, and this is heightened when we recall that medieval debate poems must be assumed to be written by people who lived and wrote in ultimate expectation of the least comic judgement imaginable.

The second term from the opening lines of *O&N* which rewards closer attention occurs in line 14, where the Nightingale is found 'In one hurne [corner] of one breche'. As Bennett has already noted, 'breche' in this sense seems to be quite a new term in Middle English.[223] It derives from Old English 'brecan', meaning 'to break (into)'.[224] It seems to have been applied to an area of land cleared for arable use. Land clearance was increasing rapidly at this point in the decades following the influx of the Norman invaders,[225] and their language may also have been an influence on the development of this word.[226] It begins to appear in the cartularies in the first decades of the thirteenth century, around the

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evergreen ivy, associated with winter.

[221] C.T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1969), s.v. 'concisio'.

[222] It is tempting to wonder whether the poet knew the Old English word 'dæl' meaning 'portion, part, division, separation', related to the verb 'dælan' meaning 'to divide, part, separate' (Bosworth-Toller, s.v. 'dæl' and 'dælan'). This would punningly make a 'dale' an intrinsically appropriate place for dispute and division, but sadly the grammar means that even if the poet intended to play on these near-homophones he could only be doing so in a glancing reference, not a full pun.

[223] Bennett, *Middle English Literature*, p. 4.

[224] Bosworth-Toller, s.v. 'brecan'.

[225] See Reginald Lennard, *Rural England 1086-1135* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 14-16 and Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086-1348* (London, 1978), pp. 33-5.

time when our poem is often judged to have been written. It is notable that in two separate cartularies, it appears in place names in combination with 'hurne'. The first of these entries is from the cartulary of 'Boarstall House near Brill' (henceforth *B*):[227]

> *et sic exinde usque Abouethebreche; et sic exinde usque ad riuulum descendendo usque le Brechehurne*[.]
>
> and so after that as far as Above-the-breach; and so after that descending all the way to the brook as far as (the) Brechehurne[.][228]

This mention of Brechehurne occurs in a description of a *perambulacio* (item 576 in the cartulary) of Bernwood forest, at the extreme west end of Buckinghamshire, a few miles to the east of Oxford. The *perambulacio* took place in 1298 (perhaps not long after *O&N* was composed, if Cartlidge's post-1272 dating of the poem is correct). The previous item in the cartulary describes the boundaries of the forest, and this recorded 'perambulation' may well be intended to perform a similar function:[229] at any rate, it is clear that Brechehurne is intended to be a specific and unmistakable place, not simply a corner of a clearing, even though it is this landscape feature that gives rise to not one but two local proper names in this extract.[230]

The second mention (or set of mentions) of Brechehurne as a place-name occurs in another recorded *perambulacio*, this time through Shotover Wood, directly to the east of Oxford. This record is preserved in two slightly differing

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[226] See MED, s.v. 'breche'.
[227] H. E. Salter, ed., *The Boarstall Cartulary*, Oxford Historical Society 86 (Oxford, 1930), p. v.
[228] *Boarstall Cartulary*, p. 182 (my translation).
[229] R.E. Latham, ed., *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources* (London, 1965), s.v. 'perambul atio' gives the senses 'perambulation, survey, walking of bounds' attested from 1183.

versions: one is in the same Boarstall cartulary as the previous extract, where it is item number 574; the other comes from the cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire (item 652, henceforth *E*). There is no date for these entries, and items in the Eynsham cartulary are not in chronological order, but in that collection this item is preceded by similar recorded walks through other forests in the area around Oxford, including Witney (item 650) and Wychwood (item 649). The latter is particularly notable for having been conducted on 12th March 1298, by (amongst others) *magister* John Gilbert and Roger de Hegham, both of whom in the same year also took part in the *perambulacio* of Bernwood Forest discussed above (which also mentioned a place called Brechehurne). It seems likely that both official walks were part of a royal survey of some kind, and given the arrangement of the cartulary it is possible (although unproven) that the other perambulations here recorded took place at a similar time.

For my present purposes, two short extracts from the Shotover *perambulacio* are relevant, and I quote them from *E*:[231]

> *et sic vsque le Breche: et sic vsque Brechynhurne, quod est inter boscum domini regis qui vocatur Stouwewod' & le Brech' de Elesfeud*[.]
>
> and so up to (the) Breche: and so up to Brechynhurne, which is between the woodland of my lord the king which is called Stowewood and the Breche of Elesfeud[.] [ll. 6-8]

> *et sic vsque cornarium de Perkeresbreche de Beckele, et sic usque le Dycheshend de Beckele, et sic directe per hayam vsque Brecheshurne persone de Beckele vsque Stowodmere* [...] *et sic per hayam vsque Brecheshurne ad capud bosci Iohannis de Sancto Iohanne*[.]

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[230] The 'le' in both cartulary extracts quoted here again suggests Anglo-Norman influence in the place-name; cf. 'Le Havre', or 'La Rochelle'.

[231] H.E. Salter, ed., *The Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham*, 2 vols, Oxford Historical Society 51 (Oxford, 1907-8), vol. 2 p. 96; my translation.

> and so up to the corner of Parkersbreche de Beckele, and so up the Ditchend de Beckele, and so in a straight line through the hedge[232] up to Brecheshurne of the person of Beckele as far as Stowewoodmere [...] and so through the hedge as far as Brecheshurne up to the top of the woodland of John of St. John[.] [ll. 15-20]

Several *breche*-derived names occur in this passage, and *le Breche*, *Brechynhurne* and *le Brech' de Elesfeud* are clearly three separate but adjacent and related landmarks, that is to say two clearings (one distinguished by use of an owner's name) and the '*hurne* of a *breche*' that abuts one of them. This latter could almost be a description of the setting of *O&N*. The *Brecheshurne* mentioned in the second part of this extract (carefully distinguished from *Perkeresbreche de Beckele*) might seem on grammatical grounds to be a further different place (–es and –yn/–en being distinct forms of the genitive ending). However, this is far from certain, since the *B* version of this text has *Brechhurne* in place of the Eynsham version's *Brechynhurne*, from which we may surmise that distinctions between *brech-*, *brechen-* and *brechyn-* were not strictly observed even in official documents.

There are further textual reasons for thinking that all the mentions of Brecheshurne in the Shotover *perambulacio* refer to one place. The second extract from *E* contains the awkward phrase *per hayam vsque Brecheshurne persone de Beckele vsque Stowodemere*, but in *B* this is rendered as *per hayam persone de Beckele usque Stowode mere*. It thus seems likely that this mention of Brecheshurne in *E* is a result of scribal eyeskip, with the scribe anticipating *per hayam usque Brecheshurne ad caput* [etc.] in his exemplar, whether this was *B* or another copy like it. On this reading, preserved in *B* and making better sense of *E*, there are only two discrete mentions of a place called Brecheshurne,

[232] Or, less probably, 'enclosure': see Latham, *Medieval Latin Word List*, s.v. 'hai/a (hay-)'.

and although they are mentioned at different points in the *perambulacio*, the fact that in each case the walk is directed *usque* ('up to / as far as') Brecheshurne means that it is not impossible that they refer to the same place. In any case, we should note that in both instances, the directions indicate the need to go through a *hay* (hedge) to reach the *Brecheshurne*, a detail with which *O&N* concurs entirely, since the Nightingale is discovered 'In ore vaste þicke hegge'.

These references suggest much more than that 'hurne' was a usual or even a technical term for the point where the open land meets the remaining forest, and that the poet knew enough about the sort of landscape setting he describes to get his details absolutely right. They also raise the tantalising possibility that by referring to 'one hurne of one breche' the poet may have been making a punning reference to a real place called Brecheshurne. Such a pun would not be unique in Middle English literature, since it has long been recognised that Chaucer's reference to 'A long castel' in *The Book of the Duchess* puns on Lancaster, the Duchy of John of Gaunt, the patron for whom the poem was intended.[233] Given this, it becomes all the more significant that all of the references I have so far been able to trace are concerned with sites near Oxford. I have argued above that the Shotover *perambulacio* may in fact only mean to refer to one place called Brecheshurne rather than two or more, but this is still hard to identify with the place of the same name mentioned in the Bernwood itinerary. This makes it impossible to identify any place the poet may refer to with a specific location, but the evidence does suggest a link between the poet and the university town of Oxford. This link in itself is appropriate, since

teaching at Oxford, just as at any western European university in the late twelfth century, was based partly on the techniques of formal debate. Is this then part of the answer to the enigmas surrounding the poem? Critics agree on the technical accomplishment of the poet: might he have been a scholar at Oxford, amusing himself and his friends in his leisure hours by turning his learning to ribald and scabrous ends?

It is also worth noting in passing that *MED* also lists other meanings for 'breche' which include 'an injury to the human body', 'breach (of the peace)' and 'a rupture in friendly relations'. All of these senses are evidently highly appropriate for the action and tone of *O&N*, but sadly there is no evidence from which it can be argued that these senses must be operating here, since the quotations that *MED* provides all come from the end of the fourteenth century at the earliest. Nevertheless, they are suggestive of the force that this word acquired during the Middle Ages, and they underline the way in which the location of this debate is entirely appropriate for its content.

After the ground has (literally and metaphorically) been prepared in these complex and suggestive opening lines, questions of landscape quite properly recede from the poem's attention, which turns instead to the matter of the debate between the two birds. Yet landscape description makes another important contribution to the manipulation of audience understanding and expectations in a brief passage shortly before the end of the poem. This occurs at lines 1635-7,

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[233] *The Book of the Duchess* l. 1318. See also the notes on this line on pp. 329, 966 and especially p. 976 of Benson et al., *Riverside Chaucer*.

when the Nightingale believes that the Owl has made a slip fatal to her argument and is therefore about to claim victory in the debate:

> þe Nihtegale iherde þis
> An hupte uppon on blowe ris
> An herre sat þan heo dude ear [...]
>
> The Nightingale heard this, and hopped onto a blossoming branch, and sat higher than she did before [...]

As with the poem's opening lines, this detail is perfectly consistent with naturalism since birds do hop from branch to branch, especially when agitated. Yet the point is not that the Nightingale hops onto a new perch, but that she does so at this point in the poem (she has not moved from her original 'ris' before now), and that the poet takes the trouble to tell us as much. Cartlidge sees a practical motivation on the part of the Nightingale, moving so as to be 'in a better position to broadcast her song'.[234] Whilst this repositioning may make it easier for the other birds to hear and come to the Nightingale's aid (as they do in lines 1658-62), this surely cannot be why the poet mentions it here, just after she thinks that the Owl has lost the debate by contradicting herself. The speech that follows the move to a higher bow (1638-52) is still addressed to the Owl, and it is not until she repositions herself again (1654) and begins singing that the other birds come to hear the Nightingale. In fact, this detail of positioning is included primarily for symbolic reasons. It is the poet who moves the Nightingale to the higher branch, hinting by means of setting at the sense of superiority that she now feels.

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[234] Cartlidge, *Text and Translation*, p. 92.

There are at least three perspectives interacting within these few lines. One is something like the objective comment of the landscape, the 'way things are', which in this case reflects the Nightingale's sense of impending victory. She can choose to move to a position that is in every sense superior, but she cannot make that new bough blossom: only nature and the poet-narrator can do that. Thus, by associating her with new life, the poet suggests that she is right to consider herself in the ascendant. The second perspective in play is that of the audience. Since the Nightingale's confidence is given support by the setting in which the poet places her, we as audience are invited to imagine that after a long debate events are conspiring in her favour, and at last we now know who will ultimately be triumphant. This, of course, is the joke, that the audience believes that it knows what is going on, that it can predict the end of the story. For the third perspective here is that of the poet-joker, who allows his audience to imagine itself cleverer than either bird, or the narrator, or the poet, before exerting his privilege of withholding information, and thus proving that he remains in control. This small example shows that the poet was capable of conceiving the positioning of his characters relative to their environment in symbolic terms, of using the places in which they are found to comment upon their internal merits or characters, or the extent to which their case is prospering. Even more than this, he was capable of using such fleeting details as part of a larger strategy, slyly deceiving readers and hearers into thinking that they have mastered the rules of what is going on in the poem, only to prove the opposite.

In comparison to *O&N*, the bird debate poems that followed in English are less rewarding in their use of landscape descriptions, but a few merit

discussion here. I shall therefore turn now to examine *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, *The Clerk and the Nightingale*, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, *Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt*, *A Disputation Between the Body and the Worms*, *Winner and Waster* and *Death and Liffe*. The setting in these poems, especially the bird debates, is generally consonant with that in *O&N*, but rarely with the same elaboration. An exception is *The Thrush and the Nightingale*,[235] whose opening lines are very similar to those of the well-known lyric 'Lenten ys come with love to toune' from MS Harley 2253.[236] The Harley MS is later than Bodleian MS Digby 86 which contains *The Thrush and the Nightingale*, but John W. Conlee suggests that the lyric could have predated the debate.[237] Certainly it seems likely that the debate poem echoes the lyric rather than vice versa, since the opening lines (a series of indications that summer has come) provide the idea from which a bird debate can arise (one indication of the new season is the different songs sung by various birds), rather than describing the location the narrator was in when he heard the debate take place, as is the case with the other Middle English bird debates.

In *The Clerk and the Nightingale* only the first line is concerned with setting (temporal rather than geographic: 'In a mornyng of May'), clearly an economical evocation of the spring season appropriate to several poetic traditions, including (after *O&N*) the bird debate. This poem is untypical of the bird debates in many ways (not least in that the narrator becomes one of the

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[235] Text in Bruce Dickins and R.M. Wilson, eds, *Early Middle English Texts*, pp. 71-76.
[236] See *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of Ms. Harley 2253*, ed. G.L. Brook (Manchester, 1948), p. 43.
[237] Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 239; Brook, like Dickins and Wilson, notes the similarity between the two poems but does not comment on which may be earlier (Brook, *Harley Lyrics*, p. 8; Dickins and Wilson, p. 195).

disputants), but has affinities with some of the more mischievous pastourelles in its reversal of expectations (the Nightingale, traditional bird of lovers, actually tries to persuade the narrator to give up his love).

The late-fourteenth century poem *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* is an accomplished Chaucerian piece, which dwells at length on the importance of May as the time of the debate and as the season of love, but pays less attention to the place in which it happens. However, it is interesting to note the growing influence of the dream vision on the debate poem here. The action in *O&N* and *The Thrush and the Nightingale* (both from the second half of the thirteenth century) is not framed within any sort of dream, but when we come to *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, the narrator tells us that

> I am so shaken with þe feuers white,
> Of al þis May slepe I but a lite [...] (41-2)

This insomnia leads indirectly to the experience of the debate: the narrator tells us that 'as I lay þis oþir ny$_3$t waking' he remembers the belief shared by lovers that it is a good omen to hear the nightingale before the cuckoo, and so decides to go out and hear what birds are singing so as to resolve his own 'sekenes' of love.

The key phrase here is 'as I lay'. This is an extremely common phrase in Middle English literature, and obviously useful to poets introducing a dream vision, as Chaucer does in *The Parlement of Foules* (95). Its appearance in the debate poems signals the influence of dream vision, not because it is a phrase unique to that discourse (it is not), but because it is a convenient way of accommodating some of its ideas. The poets surely felt the similarity in the

opportunities that both conventions offered of dealing with difficult or important issues at a safe distance, either through the marvellous (as often happens in debates, where animals, dead bodies or tools can talk) or through the questionable revelation of a dream. If we assume an awareness of this proximity on the part of the poet, then we can begin to understand the increasing combination of the two conventions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

So in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* we have a kind of compromise between debate poem and dream vision: no dream vision in fact takes place, but the motif of lying on a bed suggests the (denied) possibility of a vision. Moreover, the thought that comes to the narrator on his bed can be read as a kind of revelation, since he subsequently does receive the guidance he seeks from the birds, as his nocturnal inspiration suggested. (A similar movement is visible in the opening lines of *The Clerk and the Nightingale*: 'In a morning of May / As I lay on slepyng / To here a song of a fowle / I had gret liking.') The two poetic traditions occupy different physical spaces within the poem: the crypto-visionary passage takes place on the narrator's bed (57), from which he determines to 'go sum whider', which turns out to be a 'wode' through which he passes 'doun bi a broke side / Til I came til a lavnde of white and grene'. The rural setting suggests some continuity with earlier debate poems, yet here too there are hints at the dream vision. There is a suppressed pun in the poem's clever use of the phrase 'doun bi a broke side' since here 'doun' means 'along', whereas dream-

narrators often 'lay down by a brook' before they sleep and dream.[238] The 'lavnde' will recur in the alliterative debates that I examine below.

The influence of dream vision can in fact be seen in an earlier poem, *Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt*, the earliest manuscript of which comes from the late thirteenth century.[239] As its title suggests, in this most accomplished of debates between body and soul in Middle English the action takes place in a setting appropriate to dream visions. Whether the narrator is actually asleep depends on the meaning of the difficult word 'drounkening' in the second line, but the implication is surely that some sort of vision is taking place:

> Als I lay in a wynteris nyt,
> In a drounkening bifor þe day,
> Vorsoþe I sau$_3$ a selly syt [...] (1-3)

Here the combination of conventions is less ambiguous. The content is that of debate, whereas the framing is clearly that of a dream vision. Indeed, when birds were not involved, the debate convention allowed for the location to be adapted to suit the nature of the debate, whether it be the Temple in Jerusalem for *Jesus and the Masters of the Laws of the Jews*, or the nightmare or a 'þester stude [dark place]'[240] for a body and soul debate.

In the fifteenth-century poem *A Disputation between the Body and the Worms*, there is again a pattern of movement from the 'place' in which the poem opens (in this case it is more of a state of mind, where a recent outbreak of

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[238] For a further example, see *Piers Plowman* where the dreamer has his first vision sleeping 'Under a brood bank by a bournes syde' (William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London, 1997), Prologue, l. 8.)
[239] Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 11.
[240] 'In a þestri stude I stode', l.1, in Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 11.

plague has clearly made the narrator think about his own mortality) out into a rural setting where the debate is experienced, as in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and *The Clerk and the Nightingale*. Yet in this instance the landscape into which we move is 'a wilsome felde' (8), where stands a church. Once again, there seem to be two functions prompting the choice of setting: on the one hand journeying out into a rural setting seems a residual element from earlier debates, though it is unusual for a body and soul debate. On the other hand, the debate itself does not take place out in the field, but inside the church, when the narrator has fallen into a 'slomer'.

Whilst the bird debates that followed *O&N* focused on love and questions that (for the male poets) were related to it, such as the worth and virtue of women, other forms of debate engaged with political or metaphysical issues. This is particularly true of the alliterative debates of the fourteenth century, *Winner and Waster*, *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, and *Death and Liffe*.[241] These poems are often simultaneously debate, dream vision, allegory and satire. They undoubtedly have much in common with *Piers Plowman* and the poems that followed in its tradition (although *Winner and Waster* was written some years before *Piers Plowman*), but there are important structural differences as well. Langland's poem is in the form of a 'vertical' conversation, where the protagonist is largely taught by the figures of authority (or presumed authority) he meets in his visions. In contrast, the narrators in the other three poems are observers of a 'horizontal' debate between two or more broadly evenly matched

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[241] *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. M.Y. Offord, EETS OS 246 (Oxford, 1959); *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ed. Stephanie Trigg, EETS OS 297 (Oxford, 1990); *Death and Liffe* is included in Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, pp. 139-65, and is also available in James H. Hanford and

figures.[242] Where opposing views are presented in *Piers Plowman*, there is little doubt as to who is in the right. The contrasting structure of the true debate poems often suggests that the poet is intent on using the near-equality of his protagonists' positions as a key element in his poem.

In each of these three poems, another notable feature is the development of a setting much more elaborate than any to be found in the earlier debates in English. The influence of the dream vision element is important here, as the sounds from the brook and the singing of the birds, together with the scents of the wild flowers, are often referred to in that convention as the causes of the dreamer's slumber. More intriguing is the increasing interest in allegory or symbolic meaning that these longer descriptions appear to show. This too may have come about partly under the influence of the dream vision convention (landscape symbolism plays an important role in, for example, *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*), but it should also be remembered that in the older Latin debate poems this technique was a key ingredient. Thus in Sedulius Scottus's *Rosae Liliique Certamen* from the ninth century, the lily is an emblem of virginity, the rose of martyrdom.[243] Likewise, Virgil's *Eclogues* used a symbolic pastoral setting as an oblique means of addressing political issues.[244] Indeed, the anomaly is rather that *O&N*, the earliest surviving English debate poem, does not consistently portray either of its debaters as emblematic of a

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John M. Steadman Jr, eds, *Death and Liffe: An Alliterative Poem* (Chapel Hill, 1918), but the standard edition is Joseph M. Donatelli, *An Edition of Death and Liffe* (Toronto, 1984).

[242] The terms were coined by Stephen Gilman in *The Art of La Celestina* (Madison, 1956), pp. 159-60. They are used in a slightly different sense by T.L. Reed Jr, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia, 1990), pp. 3-4.

[243] Duemmler, *Monumenta*, vol. III (1896), pp. 230-1.

[244] See the discussion above, and also Charles Martindale, *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste: An Essay in Aesthetics* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 141-50.

particular virtue.[245]

The earliest of these three poems is *Winner and Waster*, and the references to political events seem so specific that editors have assigned its composition to 1352-3.[246] The poet provides a double setting for this poem, the first the 'real' location in which he has been walking prior to his dream, the second that of the dream-world. The first landscape largely follows the conventions of dream vision poetry, although there is a notable inversion of some expectations when the singing of the birds actually prevents the narrator from sleeping for several hours, rather than lulling him (42-44).[247] We then pass (once again via the tag phrase 'as I laye', 45) to the landscape of the dream itself:

> a loueliche lande þat was ylike grene
> þat laye loken by a lawe the lengthe of a myle. (48-9)

On either side of this meadow there is a wood, and in each there is an army dressed for war. The narrator longs for the arrival of the prince/king, who is more skilled than anyone else at bringing peace between the two sides, and then goes on to describe the pavilion that will turn out to belong to the king, pitched 'At the creste of a clyffe' (59).

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[245] As Hume notes (*The Poem and its Critics*, pp. 51-6), there is some consistency in the portrayal of the Owl's nature, but the character of the Nightingale is more self-contradictory. Moreover, it is hard to pin down to a single trait or virtue the general impression that each bird gives, and as the poem progresses it becomes obvious that the debate is not about the conflict of two such traits but of two individual birds.

[246] Sir Israel Gollancz considered that 'the cumulative value of all [the] evidence clearly points to the winter of 1352-3 as the date of composition' (*A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster*, ed. Sir Israel Gollancz (Oxford, 1921, reprinted Cambridge 1974), p. 6). Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, (p. 63), opts for 1353, but Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson and Myra Stokes, *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford, 2007) concur with Gollancz, contra Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, pp. xxii-xxvii, and Elizabeth Salter, 'The Timeliness of *Wynnere and Wastoure*', *Medium Ævum* 47 (1978), 40-65.

[247] Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 68.

We can obviously find realistic reasons for the use of such a landscape. If two armies are seeking to meet each other in battle, they will have to find a clearing large enough for fighting, and may well approach it from the cover of woods. Yet there are also symbolic functions at work here. Enclosure is one way of making sense of a dream vision, of providing an unreal space in which to deal with real-world problems in a schematic (and therefore simplified, easier-to-handle) way, without having to solve the imaginative problem of what lies beyond the mountain. Similarly, the pitching of the king's tent on a cliff above the battlefield enables him to see what will happen, and so is logically useful for the narrative of the poem (he will send a messenger to call the sides to a parley), but also places him above the dispute, and therefore on the side of neither. At the opening of the poem, then, we are presented with the possibility that he will be able to arbitrate and exercise justice, heightening the comic and satiric power of the poem when, in the closing lines as we have them, he seems unvirtuously to favour both.

The arena in which the battle of the poem takes place resonates with contemporary practices in a number of ways, and although the text has not yet attracted a critical literature that could be described as extensive, the striking landscape of the vision has already prompted one critic, R.W.V. Elliott, to examine it further.[248] In his study, Elliott finds evidence for the influence of medieval theatrical practices on this setting. His analysis of certain key phrases in this connection is provocative, especially concerning lines 48-9, cited above. However, whilst asking many of the right questions, Elliott comes to conclusions

that I believe to be erroneous, and before arguing for my own interpretation of this landscape, it will be necessary for me to examine his.

Elliott considers that 'loken by a lawe' must mean one of three things: '(i) The grassy space was flanked by a hill, a mile long, at one end or along one side; (ii) the space was surrounded by hills or even ranges of hills [...] (iii) the grassy space is surrounded by an unbroken, in that case presumably artificial, earthwork, a mile in circumference'.[249] He is surely right to reject the first possibility on the grounds that 'loken' implies a more complete enclosure that would result from hills on one side only.[250] He further considers that the singular 'a lawe' rules out the possibility of a range of hills all round the 'lande'. This leaves the third possibility, which Elliott accepts, but which I find unconvincing. The opposition he posits between the second and third options is firstly one of number (several as opposed to one) and secondly one of kind (a natural hill as opposed to an 'artificial earthwork'), and we need to make a distinction between these. I agree that the grammar obliges us to be thinking of a single obstruction encircling the 'lande', but I do not accept that this forces us to think in terms of an artificial earthwork, and even if it did it is not necessary for us to conclude that it is evidence of the influence of medieval staging on the poem.[251] Whilst it may be literally true that real-world spaces are never entirely enclosed by a

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[248] R.W.V. Elliott, 'The Topography of Wynnere and Wastoure', *English Studies* 48 (1967), 134-40.

[249] Elliott, 'Topography', 136.

[250] It is possible that one or more lines have been lost from the poem after line 49, since line 50 introduces two woods to the landscape rather abruptly ('In aythere holte was ane here in hawberkes full brighte'). This would make it possible to understand the 'lawe' as bordering the 'lande' on one side, with the missing passage having supplied details of another obstruction opposite, and woods on the remaining two sides. However, this remains pure speculation and I prefer to deal here with the definite content of the poem as it survives.

single hill, it must be remembered that this is a visionary landscape, so that there is no need for us to be strictly naturalistic when re-imagining it as readers. Furthermore, if one follows a naturalistic line of argument it is necessary to point out that the earthwork would have to be remarkably high if the poet can see it above the woods from which the armies emerge.

Moreover, Elliott's conclusions are based on interpretations of medieval staging that have themselves now been thoroughly questioned. Elliott draws heavily on R.W. Southern's conclusions regarding the staging of *The Castle of Perseverance*, but the particular point of Southern's argument upon which Elliott seizes has largely been discredited by more recent scholars such as Steven Pederson:

> because the plan [in the MS of *The Castle of Perseverance*, supposed to bear some relation to its staging] shows a ditch, Southern assumes that the dirt removed from it was piled up on the inside of the circle and became an embankment [...] even though there is no evidence of this in the plan.[252]

In fact, the more important influence on the poem's landscape may be one that Elliott mentions only in passing. He notes that 'the lengthe of a myle' is 'probably a good deal larger than the area of most actual medieval round theatres', but argues that this is not fatal to his argument since 'it is as well to remember that the medieval circular theatre has a close relation to the lists used for medieval tournaments.'[253] He goes on to quote the description of the lists from Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (1881ff), of which 'the circuit a myle was aboute',

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[251] Elliott argues that there is a parallelism between the artificial earthwork he detects in the poem and the 'mound' he believes to have been used to enclose the performance area of a morality play in around 1400. See Elliott, 'Topography', 138-9.
[252] S.I. Pederson, *The Tournament Tradition and Staging* The Castle of Perseverance (Ann Arbor, 1987), p. 6.

the same circumference as the earlier poem's 'lawe'. Rather than supporting Elliott's contention that the influence of medieval drama is at work here, this line of reasoning seems rather to suggest that we should in fact be thinking in terms of tournaments and the lists. Such a suggestion is strengthened by comments such as the following, again from Pederson:

> A chivalric contest could take place in an open field, a courtyard, city square, or a locale with natural boundaries such as a river or forest.[254]

A chivalric or tournament influence seems all the more likely given that there are similarities between the functions performed by debate poems on the one hand and tournaments on the other. Just as one of the attractions of the debate convention might be its ability to provide a secure and relatively safe place in which to examine opposing arguments, either didactically or speculatively, so the tournament can be seen as growing from its apparent origins as a place of military training to becoming a spectacle for entertainment and a channel for the expression of violent energies in such a way as to cause less damage than unregulated warfare.[255] Other parallels can be drawn with trial by combat, which took place in arenas similar to but smaller than those used in tournaments, and of which debate is the verbal equivalent.[256]

It may also be possible to trace at least one other source from which the poet may have drawn inspiration, consciously or unconsciously. Statius' poem

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[253] Elliott, 'Topography', 138.
[254] Pederson, *Tournament Tradition*, p. 25.
[255] For early tournaments as military training, see G. Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300-1660 Volume One 1300-1576* (London, 1963), pp. 13-14. This function might be compared to the idea that debate poems such as *The Owl and the Nightingale* are the result of clerks exercising their poetic skills on a frivolous subject as a means of recreation and to demonstrate their learning.
[256] See Pederson, *Tournament Tradition*, p. 26.

the *Thebaid* had a far-reaching influence on the literature of the Middle Ages, largely due to its status as a school-text from the tenth century onwards, and its influence on Boccaccio, Dante and Chaucer is well documented.[257] It would therefore not be surprising if it had also left an impression on our poet. In the *Thebaid* VI.255-6 there is a description of the location for the funeral games of Opheltes which is worth quoting at length:

> *Collibus incurvis viridique obsessa corona*
> *vallis in amplexu nemorum sedet; hispida circum*
> *stant iuga, et obiectus geminis umbonibus agger*
> *campum exire vetat, longo quem tramite planum*
> *gramineae frontes sinuataque caespite vivo*
> *mollia non subitis augent fastigia clivis.*
> *illic conferti, iam sole rubentibus arvis,*
> *bellatrix sedere cohors*[.]
>
> A valley sits embraced by woods amid a green circle of winding hills. Shaggy ridges stand around and an interposing mound with double bosses forbids the plain's exit. This, a long level strip, is raised by grassy brows and gentle slopes, curving with living lawn in a smooth incline. There assembled, when the fields were already rosy with the sun, the warrior troop took their seats.

It must be acknowledged from the first that Statius is quite clearly referring to a range of 'hills' (in the plural) encircling the valley, rather than the singular *lawe* in the later English poem. It is equally possible that the lines *et obiectus geminis umbonibus agger / campum exire vetat* could be the source either of the *lawe* or the English poet's 'clyffe', although this is more doubtful. If it is hard to nail a direct correspondence, this is at least partly because, in the words of its most recent editor, 'the description is hard to make out'.[258] Yet in view of the overall similarity between the landscapes from the two poems (both large flat open areas surrounded by hills and/or mounds) it is not hard to imagine that a text as influential as the *Thebaid* might have prompted the medieval poet's choice here.

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[257] See footnote 138, above.

In the *Thebaid* as in *Winner and Waster* the similar landscapes occur in contexts that have something in common, namely the idea of competition. In the *Thebaid*, the valley enclosed by hills is the scene for the funeral games held in honour of Opheltes. These games, traditional in epic poetry since Homer and the funeral games for Patroclus in book 23 of the *Illiad*, take the form here of a series of challenges to each of the Seven (who lead the war against Thebes) in turn: each challenge is therefore, in fact, the physical equivalent of a debate. We might press the comparison further by pointing out that the Seven in the Latin poems are each leaders of their own military divisions, in a way comparable to the representative roles that Winner and Waster take on when the action moves from imminent massed warfare to personal debate before the king. In any case, the parallels make this passage potentially a rich source for the Middle English poet, and, although I think it unlikely that he would have expected his readers to notice the parallel, I do think it quite probable that the passage from Statius was somewhere in his mind when he envisaged the setting for his own poem.

Taken together, these resonances with tournaments and Classical literature reposition the poem away from the world of drama posited by Elliott and back to the milieu of court culture. This is surely a far more appropriate context for the poem, dealing as it does with matters of governance and their abuse. It does not help us to decided whether the poem was intended (for example) to prick the conscience of the king into action, or flatter the grievances of a provincial nobleman, but it certainly does suggest that the circles in which it

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[258] Shackleton Bailey, *Thebaid*, p. 345, fn. 24.

was produced and received were more concerned and familiar with matters military and chivalric (and perhaps literary-classical) than dramatic.

A further subtlety in the conception of the dream landscape is its relation to the 'real' landscape in which the narrator is sleeping, something that is implied rather than openly stated or rigorously schematised. The 'bourne' by which he sleeps (33) is absent from the dream landscape, but it is not hard to see a parallel between the 'wale medewe' (34) in the waking landscape and the 'loueliche lande' if, as spelling would suggest, 'lande' here is from the French term 'launde' ('meadow'), rather than the Old English 'land'.[259] Similarly, the 'worthiliche wodde' (34) is amplified into two 'holtes' (50), and the 'hille' (36) on which the narrator lays his head becomes the 'clyffe' where the king's 'caban' is set up. This last apparent parallel is especially intriguing given the frequent medieval image of the nation as a human body, with the king as its head.[260] The transformation of one landscape into the other might even be understood to extend to the unusually discordant birds that sing by the river and initially prevent the narrator from getting to sleep:

> So ruyde were þe roughe stremys and raughten so heghe
> That it was neghande nyghte or I nappe myghte
> For dyn of the depe watir and dadillyng of fewllys. (42-4)

Conlee comments on this in his edition, noting 'nature's lack of harmony seems to mirror the social discord already described'.[261] Further evidence of the

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[259] W. Rothwell, L.W. Stone et al., *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (London, 1992), s.v. 'land(e, laund(e'; Bosworth-Toller, s.v. 'land'.
[260] See for example the discussion in J.H. Burns, *Lordship, Kingship and Empire: The Idea of Monarchy, 1400-1525* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 51-8.
[261] Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 68.

symbolic or allusive use of the landscape here is found in the discovery that the poet has even chosen his species carefully to create this effect of discord. The 'bernacle' or barnacle-goose (39) was thought to spring directly from the trunk of the fir tree, rather than being born in a more normal fashion.[262] It is possible that the poet knew some of the widespread lore regarding this bird, as recorded in Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*:

> *Habet et aves quas bernaces vocant, quas aucis silvestribus similes de lignis abietinis quasi contra naturam natura producit, quibus viri religiosi tempore jejuniorum vescuntur*[.]
>
> There are also birds which are called barnacle-geese, which nature produces from woody growths resembling bits of fir-timber, as though against nature, and which religious men eat on fast days.[263]

A sense of disorder and imbalance in the state of things finds expression in the idea of nature working *contra naturam*, and in the somewhat paradoxical belief that the birds may be eaten during times of fasting since, as Higden goes on to record, its meat is not held to be truly flesh. All of this would seem to be appropriate to the state that the poet wishes to describe here, a bird whose nature is unnatural, who cannot help but be opposed to the proper order of things, just as the character and name of Waster are one and the same. Geese are also, of course, famously noisy, and Isidore of Seville passed on to the Middle Ages the tradition that it was the cackling of geese which warned Rome of the invasion of

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[262] It is not easy to say where this tradition comes from. The *Speculum Sacerdotale* mentions it in translating a Latin phrase which it claims come from Augustine. However, the parallel passage in Augustine's sermons makes no mention of barnacle geese. See *Speculum Sacerdotale*, ed. E.H. Weatherly, EETS OS 200 (1936), p. 41 and note on p. 260. An alternative 'unnatural' account of the origins of the barnacle goose entered the bestiary tradition from the *Topography of Ireland* of Gerald of Wales: see T.H. White, *The Book of Beasts*, (Stroud, 1992), pp. 238 and 267-8.

[263] *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, ed. C. Babington (9 vols., London, 1865-86), vol. 1, p. 334; my translation.

the Gauls.[264] They are therefore simultaneously suggestive of loud disruption and the need for a civilisationto be on guard against attack.

The 'heghwalles' of line 38 are woodpeckers. perhaps specifically green woodpeckers. They also appear in a poem beginning 'When the son the laumpe of heuen ful lyght', where they are specifically excluded (along with cuckoos) from a list of birds whose songs will soothe and help in wooing (101). Interestingly, in that poem the song of the 'throstel' is deemed fit 'man is ere to plese' (104-5).[265] However, it seems likely that the poet in *Winner and Waster* is drawing on a more disparaging conception of the thrush, as seen in *The Thrush and The Nightingale* above, where it is the adversary of women and of love. These three birds together, then, seem to be opposed to order and harmony in nature and, by implication, in affairs of government and state.

In line with this technique of subtly transforming one landscape into another, the birds that gather in the trees can now be understood as more exactly prefiguring the armies that are massed for war 'In aythere holte'. (The noise of the river is also explicitly included by the poet as a reason for his difficulty in slumber – is this conventional river being used here as a physical expression of the division that has come into the land, between Winner and Waster. and the disruption is creates?)[266] In this poem, then, there is a complicated movement between three spheres: firstly the political realities in which the poet lived;

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[264] *Etymologies*. Book 12. 7.52.
[265] The poem has been published by E.P. Hammond, 'How a Lover Praiseth His Lady'. *Modern Philology* 21 (1924). 379-95. All quotations are taken from this edition.
[266] There is a precedent for streams being noisy rather than relaxing. but from eclogue rather than debates: *ne vicini nobis sonus obstrepat amnis, / gramina linquamus ripamque volubilis undae*.

secondly the landscape in which his narrator falls asleep; and lastly the landscape of the dream. The second of these, although presented as being in the 'real world' (albeit using many of the conventions of dream vision poetry) actually symbolises the first in part, and it is the unreal world of the dream which restores these symbolic implications to their realities in a schematised way. The unrest caused by the policies of Edward III finds expression first in unnatural nature and then both are expressed in greater depth by the pending war in the dream, not so far removed from the genuine threat of baronial warfare.

The poem known to modern editors as *Death and Liffe* has been too little studied, for despite some confusions created by apparent textual corruption, it is a rewarding and highly accomplished poem, a brilliant use of the debate tradition in order to re-tell the story of the crucifixion and harrowing of hell, events that form the climax of the text. The opposition of Dame Liffe and Dame Death is mapped onto the battle between Christ and Satan understood to have taken place in the events of Easter. This identification becomes clear towards the end of the poem (345-459) when Dame Death claims to have overcome Christ, but Dame Liffe goes on to tell of His victory over death. In lines 401-430 Liffe is presented in ideas borrowed from the world of medieval romance, as the Lady rescued by her Knight (Christ) from the 'tower' (420) of her enemy (Satan) and the latter's Lady (Death). It has long been noted that this association of the two female figures with Christ and Satan respectively is prepared by use of landscape in lines 57 and 142, where the directions from which Lady Life and Dame Death enter are symbolically appropriate. Dame Death is first heard 'in a nooke of the

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'let us leave the meadow and the bank of the flowing stream, so that the sound of the

north' (142), a direction long associated with the Devil.[267] Dame Liffe is seen when the narrator looks 'estward' (57), and as Conlee points out this direction 'suggests dawn and the coming of day, freshness, renewal, regeneration'.[268] Most importantly it suggests resurrection, which for Christians is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, the fact that will ultimately win the argument for Lady Life. Christian churches are oriented towards the east, and tomb sculptures face in that direction, traditionally with their eyes open, ready for resurrection.

In terms of landscape description, *Death and Liffe* has the most varied and virtuose vocabulary of these allterative debates, and landscape details are used several times to indicate not only the central opposition of the two characters, but also the ways in which this opposition echoes the Christ/Satan antithesis. In the 'real world' landscape that it describes as the scene of the narrator's slumbers, there is little that is out of the ordinary, but his dream landscape is more intriguing:

> Methought walking that I was in a wood str[a]nge,
> Vpon a great mountaine where mores were large [...] 39-40[269]

If the wood here is familiar from *Winner and Waster*, and perhaps from romances where it is a place of mystery and discovery, much like dreams themselves, then once again, as in that poem, the familiar has been defamiliarised. The manuscript reads 'stronge', and this reading is highly

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neighbouring river may not drown our music', Calpurnius, *Eclogues*, VI.62-3.
[267] Donatelli, *Death and Liffe*, p. 75.
[268] Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, p. 145.
[269] All quotations from Donatelli's edition. It seems that 'vpon' must mean 'on top of' here, since the dreamer goes on to say that he can see for seventeen miles 'on euerye side', something only possible at the top of a peak.

defensible simply on the grounds of sense,[270] but there are good metrical-grammatical reasons for accepting the emendation to 'strange' favoured by both Gollancz and Donatelli.[271]

The activity of walking upon the 'mountaine' is also remarkable. There are similarities with *Winner and Waster*, since in that poem the narrator is present not only with the armies when they face each other on the 'lande', but also when the two debaters meet with the king at the top of the 'clyffe'. Yet in that case the poet's physical movement is only implied by the movement of the narrative location: there is no explicit mention of his going from one place to another. By contrast, the climb is almost the first thing that we learn about the dream landscape in *Death and Liffe*, emphasising its importance.

This movement up the mountain, coming in a poem from the fifteenth century, is the exact opposite to the earliest setting for a Middle English debate poem, *O&N*'s 'sumere dale'. If that setting was (amongst other things) about seclusion, then this one has more to do with receiving revelation, of literally rising above the quotidian to learn about metaphysical and theological issues. When he reaches the top of the 'mountaine', the narrator comments on all that he can see:

> woods & wasts & walled townes,
> Comelye castles & cleare with caruen towers,

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[270] Donatelli notes that 'strong' is attested in the sense of 'thickly covered with undergrowth' (*OED*, s.v. 'strong' 12b). This attestation is dated around 1400, but the sense 'arduous, difficult' (in many ways a better sense in this context) is also attested from the late twelfth century onwards: see *OED* s.v. 'strong' 12a.

[271] 'The fact that strong adjectives without organic *-e* are not used anywhere else at line ending confirms Gollancz 's supposition that the poet intended the word *strange*.' (From Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter, 'Alliterative Metre and Editorial Practice: The Case of *Death and Liffe*', forthcoming (as of 2008) in a collection of essays on alliterative metre.)

Parkes & pallaces & pastures fful many,
All the world full of welth winlye to beholde. (42-45)

This is a vision of the whole earth ('All the world'), especially the rich and splendid parts of it. The last of these lines especially recalls Matthew 4.8: *iterum adsumit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum* ('Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them'). If the poet is thinking of this verse, rather than reading the narrator as being in the place of Christ here, we must view him as a spectator of the debate between Lady Life and Dame Death, a debate which is of course cast in terms of a battle between Christ and Satan. Such a parallel would prepare the audience for the significance of what follows, and could even add to the structural complexity of the poem, since Christ's temptation by Satan is always placed in the gospels at the outset of Christ's ministry, after his baptism,[272] and it is hinted at in the opening lines of the vision section of the poem. The crucifixion and resurrection are, of course, at the end of the gospel narratives, and form the climax of the poem. There is therefore a parallel between the gospels and the poem not only in content but also, to a limited extent, in overall form. It is striking that the poet relies on landscape to perform part of this mirroring.

An alternative parallel may be found within the poem itself. At line 372 the manuscript reads 'On the top of Caluarye thou [sc. Death] camest him [sc. Christ] against'. Even as it stands, this sets the battle between these two figures on an elevated geographical point, in line with the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. However, Donatelli follows Gollancz in emending 'top' to 'cop'

[272] See Matthew 4.1-11, Mark 1.13, Luke 4.1-13.

('summit'), plausibly restoring alliteration to the line on the assumption of probable scribal c/t confusion. If this is right, it further strengthens the similarity between the location for the Biblical events and that in which the dreamer imagines himself to be walking in lines 39-45. Thus the landscape of the poem is an echo of the crucifixion landscape.[273]

That such subtle and important functions within the poem should be entrusted to landscape description is not surprising in view of the survey outlined above. In *O&N*, the earliest known Middle English debate poem, landscape is already being used by a highly-skilled poet to provide clues as to how the ensuing debate was to be read. The minor poems that followed rarely match it in skill, but a close examination of the landscapes in which they are set helps us to follow the poet's thought and argument. At the end of our period, the alliterative poets had greatly expanded the landscape description section of the debate poem, not only as a poetic end in itself but also as a means of commenting on the ideas and actions that are found elsewhere in the poem. The poem is an imaginary space, and these poets continually made use of that space not merely to contain their ideas, but as an expression of and commentary on them.

[273] The devil's territory is described in terms that are in striking contrast spatially, emphasising lowness: it is a 'caue' (404), a 'dungeon' (428), full of 'holes' (413).

Chapter 5:

'Al þet is on eorðe nis bute as a schadewe': Landscapes in *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group

In this chapter, I turn to examine the uses made of landscape and spatial imagery in texts designed for or associated with anchoresses, women who had ostensibly rejected the present physical world and its associations, in favour of spiritual realities and values.[274] This particular situation creates unique problems and opportunities in the handling of landscape, making it a fruitful area for study in spite of the relative paucity of landscapes encountered.

The fundamental technical problem faced by the author of any religious or devotional text is how to represent spiritual ideas and issues in language which is necessarily shaped and conditioned by physical experiences and contexts. The texts that I will examine in this chapter solve this problem in various ways, but, in effect, writers discussing spiritual things can either talk in metaphysical and abstract language (which has at least the appearance of not being grounded in the physical world), or they can attempt to bring this within the realm of their audience's concrete experience by translating it into more obviously physical, even everyday terms.

[274] For an excellent recent collection that puts anchoritic texts into perspective in a number of illuminating ways, see Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis, eds, *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts* (Cambridge, 2005).

One might expect a work such as *Ancrene Wisse* to have little to do with a study of the perception and use of landscape.[275] This text was, after all, written for a group of women who were volunteering to be literally sealed off from the world, apparently bricked up in their anchor houses, to be counted dead as far as the present world was concerned, and shut off from all other people and places in order to pursue the love of God to the exclusion of everything else. They were choosing to reject, insofar as they were able, the present physical world in favour of a spiritual one.

However, landscape remains a valid means of interrogating anchoritic texts, since this theoretical rejection of the world beyond the anchorhold was always and inevitably highly qualified and compromised.[276] In practice, there were a number of factors which limited its extent, and it will be useful to have an idea of them, as well as the actual environment and routines of an anchoress, insofar as they can be reconstructed, before contrasting this with the idealised mental landscapes being constructed for her in these texts. To begin with, it is important to stress that it seems likely that few anchoresses (and the recluses of

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[275] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from *Ancrene Wisse* are taken from *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Ancrene Wisse, edited from MS. Corpus Christi Cambridge 402*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien., EETS OS 249 (1962). References to this edition are by folio and line. I have omitted the scribal punctuation as preserved in Tolkien's edition, and scribal contractions are silently expanded. To help trace particular images and ideas through the text I have also made use of the edition by Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo, 2000) and the *Concordance to Ancrene Wisse: MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402*, ed. J. Potts, L. Stevenson and J. Wogan-Browne (Woodbridge, 1993). Translations into modern English are mine, but I have benefited greatly from the glosses in the editions mentioned above, and from consulting the full translation in Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, trans, *Anchoritic Spirituality:* Ancrene Wisse *and Associated Works* (New York, 1991), pp. 47-207. Bella Millett's corrected edition of the Corpus MS (EETS OS 325 (2005) and 326 (2006)) only became available to me after most of this chapter was written, but I have consulted it since and tried to take Millett's impressive work in these volumes into account in my comments here.

[276] For the circumstances in which anchoresses lived, see Eddie Jones, 'Hermits and Anchorites in Historical Context', in Dyas et al., *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, pp. 3-18. This will in time be superseded by Jones's forthcoming revised edition of Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London, 1914).

this extreme type were mostly female) enjoyed total solitude. Many would have had a maidservant of some kind, responsible for getting food and doing other essential tasks of which the anchoress's enclosure rendered her incapable. In addition, the injunctions in *Ancrene Wisse* against activities such as letting men eat in their presence (f. 112b/10-11) or people sleep within the walls of the anchorhold (f. 113a/18-19) suggest that such things must have been going on, and therefore that at least some anchoresses were not taking their enclosure very strictly.[277] Some anchoresses seem to have taken social contact even further: we are told that 'Sum ancre makeð hire bord wið hire gest utewið' ('Some anchoresses take their meals with their guests outside', f. 111b/20), something which is, as the author comments laconically, 'to muche freondschipe' ('too much friendship'). He also feels it necessary to state 'Ancre ne schal nawt forwurðe scolmeistre ne turnen ancre hus to childrene scole' ('An anchoress must not become a schoolmaster, nor turn the anchorhold into a children's school', f. 114b/20-1). All of these prohibitions give clues as to the sorts of ways in which the sanctity of the anchorhold was commonly breached by the anchoresses themselves, even before *Ancrene Wisse* was written.

In conjunction with surviving architectural and archaeological evidence, the text of *Ancrene Wisse* has also been useful in helping scholars to determine the physical circumstances in which anchoresses actually lived. In particular, the Eighth Part, dealing with the Outer Rule, gives fascinating insights into the

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[277] See Hasenfratz, p. 8. The threat, to enclosure but also to virginity, was not only perceived as coming from men: 'To wummon þe wilneð hit openið ow o godes half. 3ef ha ne spekeð nawt þrof leoteð swa iwurðen, bute ȝef ȝe dreden þat heo þrefter beo iscandlet. Of hire ahne suster haueð sum ibeon itemptet.' ('To a woman who wishes it, open for God's sake. If she says nothing about it, let it be, unless you fear that she will be offended . Some have been tempted by their own sisters.' f. 15a/10-14.)

details of such a life. Those addressed in this text seem to have lived in a single-roomed cell attached to the side of a church. The cell had at least two windows.[278] One of these pierced the wall shared by the cell and the church, so that the anchoress could look through and see the host as it was elevated at the high altar during the celebration of the Mass. The other window was her means of communication with the world, through which she could give instructions to her maidservant, or receive spiritual direction from her priest or bishop. It was through this window too that she would be able to receive food and clothing as necessary, and presumably it was also used for sanitary purposes, unless there were a latrine within the anchorhold itself. This necessary lifeline was susceptible to abuse, and the main means by which an anchoress's isolation was imperilled.

Assuming that she kept to the rules of conduct outlined in the *Ancrene Wisse*, an anchoress would have frequent (perhaps daily) contact with her servant or servants for the provision of food and domestic needs, and regular contact with her confessor and spiritual director. One other detail of her routine is easy to overlook:

> 3e schulen beon idoddet oðer ȝef ȝe wulleð ischauen fowr siðen i þe ȝer to lihtin ower heaued beo bi þe her ieueset hwa se swa is leouere ant as ofte ileten blod ant ȝef neod is oftre[.] (f. 114b/27-f. 115a/2)

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[278] The cell envisaged in *Ancrene Wisse* seems to have had three: 'Vt þurh þe chirche þurl ne halde ȝe tale wið namon [...] neomeð oðerhwile to ower wummen þe huses þurl to oþre þe parlur. Speoken ne ahe ȝe bute ed tes twa þurles'('Do not hold conversation with anyone out through the window into the church [...] speak to your women sometimes [through] the anchorhold's window, to others [through] the parlour[-window]. You ought not to speak except at these two windows', f. 17a/18-23).

> You must have your hair cropped or, if you wish, shaved four times a year to lighten your head (whoever prefers should have her hair trimmed) and have blood let just as often, and more often if necessary.[279]

Whilst one of her maidservants may have been able to cut her hair, the combination of the two jobs being done together suggests that a barber-surgeon would have visited her. These stipulations are laid down as a suggestion, rather than as mandatory, and they include several different equally acceptable options. Nevertheless, it is a minor but significant point that four times a year even a strict anchoress would have had sustained physical contact with someone likely to be male and posibly lay rather than a religious.[280]

The landscapes that we find in *Ancrene Wisse* are not like those in the texts considered so far in this thesis. It is after all a text of instruction rather than a narrative, and therefore we cannot expect one sustained landscape throughout. Yet such a text cannot wholly part with the things of the wider world without retreating into total silence itself. As John Burrow as remarked regarding the *Cloud of Unknowing*, 'the nature of the fallen imagination is such that, even if we successfully stop thinking *about* created things, we will still go on thinking *with* them.'[281] In *Ancrene Wisse*, this necessary recourse to the things of the outer world not only includes (as of course it must) human language, but also a repertoire of thoughts and images borrowed from everyday human experience, as a means to explain and envisage spiritual realities. Clearly, the use of landscape here must be different from that encountered in the texts I have examined so far.

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[279] I have made use of the translation in Millet and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, p. 141 to help construe the awkward phrase 'beo bi þe her ieueset hwa se swa is leouere' here.

[280] Absolon in *The Miller's Tale* is one example of a religious barber, admittedly from a later period.

In those works, the landscape in the text provided a complete space in which to imagine events taking place, or to argue and explore a given issue. Such landscapes not only enclose, but in some sense narrate as well.

In *Ancrene Wisse*, landscape is less fundamental. Our understanding of the structure of the text is far from complete, although the recent work of several scholars has helped to improve it.[282] That most of this work has concentrated on one or at most two of the eight Parts into which the work is divided may perhaps be attributed to the fact that Janet Grayson's more ambitious attempt to understand the structure of the work as a whole through its use of imagery, whilst illuminating in many ways, has not been judged entirely satisfactory.[283] This is because *Ancrene Wisse* is a work in which thought and practice together are primary, and imagery is secondary. It is the structure of the thought that generates the images, not the adoption of a particular image which allows the author to structure his thought. Thus he has used his imagery as ornament and illustration of the thoughts around which his text is structured. This means that the images can be varied as much as the author chooses, in order to make plain the thoughts being expressed at a given moment. The images need not form an overall plan or picture in themselves, and it is therefore vain to look for a unifying structural principle in something that is not essential to the text. Yet precisely because it is not necessary that one image or set of images be used for this purpose throughout the text, it is all the more significant when such an image

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[281] J.A. Burrow, 'Fantasy and Language in The Cloud of Unknowing', *Essays in Criticism* 27 (1977), 283-98, at 287.

[282] See for example R. Dahood, 'Design in Part I of *Ancrene Riwle*', *Medium Ævum* 56 (1987), 1-11; A. Barrett, 'The Five Wits and Their Structural Significance in Part II of *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medium Ævum* 56 (1987), 12-24; Dennis Rygiel, 'Structure and Style in Part Seven of *Ancrene Wisse*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 81 (1981), 47-56.

or set of images *does* recur, since it suggests connections between different portions of the text that might not otherwise be apparent. As long as we understand that it is not primary, imagery (including landscape imagery) can still be examined in order to help us understand the development of thought, or habitual ways of understanding the anchoritic world, in certain passages of the text.

Let us examine how this works in practice. A large amount of the explanation that the writer includes in *Ancrene Wisse* is expressed in one of two fundamental spatial oppositions: up/down and inner/outer. These two spatial relations are not what the text is *about*, but they provide important tools for the author and his audience to make sense of his primary object, the anchoritic life. In the process, the ideas of up/down and inner/outer give rise a large variety of different images and expressions, and these will form the immediate object of study here. The division between inner and outer is explicitly stated by the author, and it forms the basis on which he divides his Rule into two parts.[284] The Outer Rule concerns matters of religious observance, such as regimes of prayer, bloodletting, diet, clothing and sleep. The Inner Rule is concerned with the governance of the mental faculties and emotions, their restraint from sin and direction towards the love of God. In effect, it is the body that becomes the barrier between the two rules.

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[283] Janet Grayson, *Structure and Imagery in* Ancrene Wisse (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1974).
[284] 'Monie cunne riwlen beoð. Ah twa beoð bimong alle þat ich chulle speoken of [...] þe an riwleðþe heorte [...] þe oðer riwle is al wið uten ant riwleð þe licome ant licomliche deden.' (f. 1a 13-14, 15; f. 1b 3-4). ('There are many kinds of rules, but among them all there are two that I shall speak of [...]one rules the heart [...] the other rule is entirely external and rules the body and bodily deeds.')

It is to the Inner Rule that the greater portion of the text is devoted, and the author repeatedly asserts that it is the more important of the two for his audience.[285] By contrast, the Outer Rule is treated more briefly, and the writer even goes so far as to say that the procedures he lays down for its observance should be modified by the Anchoresses (under the authority of their spiritual director) if other methods may be found that better serve the same end.[286] In the light of this, some critics have wondered why the writer at the same time puts these 'less important' sections at the beginning and end of his text, which seems to give them some kind of prominence.

In fact, there is no incongruity here. On the contrary, the large-scale arrangement of the material within the text is such that form becomes an expression and embodiment of content. By putting the instructions regarding the Outer Rule in the outer sections of his work (1 and 8), the author was building the structure of his work around the spatial metaphor that influences and helps to organise much of it. That is to say, rather than a progression from the less to the more essential (outer to inner), there is a concentric structure, and the most important parts of the rule are, literally, the more central. Thus if we resist the temptation to impose on the *Ancrene Wisse* a model of interpretation which privileges beginnings and endings as the most significant sections of a text, we can shift the focus of attention from the edges of the text to its centre. This shift is, in fact, precisely the sort of change, from externals to the inner life, that the

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[285] For example: 'ant þeos [outer] riwle nis nawt bute forte serui þe oþer. þe oþer is as leafdi. þeos as hire þuften. for al þat me eauer deð of þe oþer wið uten. nis bute forte riwlin þe heorte wið innen.' (f. 1b 8-11). ('And this [outer] rule exists only to serve the other. The other is like a Lady, this like her servant. For all that one ever does of the other [rule] externally is only in order to govern the heart internally.')

[286] See f. 2a 15-19, and f. 111a 11-19.

author seeks to bring about in his readers. In order to make sense of the text, the reader is obliged to readjust her thinking in accordance with the commands that it contains.

This placing of the Inner Rule in the inner sections of the text certainly seems to have been a deliberate structural decision. Scholars of the *Ancrene Wisse* have long been aware that its author made use of an earlier treatise written apparently for a female audience living as recluses. This text, known as *De Institutione Inclusarum*, was written by Aelred, abbot of Rievaulx Abbey in North Yorkshire, and must therefore have a *terminus ante quem* of 1167, the year of Aelred's death.[287] The *Ancrene Wisse* author knew the Latin text, and acknowledges his indebtedness by prefacing some of his remarks in Section Six with the words 'as seint ailred þe abbat wrat to his suster' (f. 99b 16).

This indebtedness allows us to compare the structure of the two works. Whilst *Ancrene Wisse* may derive its division between Inner and Outer Rules from *De Institutione Inclusarum*, the English text's diversion from its Latin ancestor is even more striking. Aelred's work moves from 'the non-spiritual aspects of the anchoritic life, such as the choice of diet and clothing that are proper to the anchoress' (the subject of the first thirteen sections), through the 'directives on personal morality, the virtues [...] and their preservation' (a further

[287] For a critical edition of Aelred's Latin text see A. Hoste and C.H. Talbot, eds, *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: 1 Opera Ascetica*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis, 1 (Turnhout, 1971), pp. 635-82 (this supersedes *La Vie de Recluse; La Prière Pastorale: Texte Latin*, ed. C. Dumont (Paris, 1961)). Besides this edition, the most thorough study of Aelred's life and work is Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study* (London, 1969). The continuing popularity of Aelred's text into the late Middle Ages is attested to by the existence of two different translations into Middle English, one from the late fourteenth century, and the other from the mid-fifteenth: see *Aelred of Rievaulx's De Institutione Reclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. J. Ayto and A. Barratt, EETS OS 287 (1984).

fifteen sections) to the final part of the rule, dealing with 'private prayer and meditation'.[288] The concentric pattern favoured by *Ancrene Wisse* must therefore be seen in some sense as a rejection of this progressive structure found in one of its chief models.

At this point I must justify my interpretation of the structure of *De Institutione Inclusarum*, since some recent critics have questioned the extent to which Aelred's text does indeed follow the tripartite form that he himself outlines for it. Thus Linda Georgianna comments that 'the two rules, so carefully separated in the *Ancrene Wisse*, are virtually indistinguishable in the [*De Institutione Inclusarum*]'.[289] This is an overstatement, but in her analysis, Bella Millett explores the same issue more carefully:

> [T]he distinction between 'outer' and 'inner' matters is not a sharp one: the first part, on the outer life, mingles – as Aelred has promised – practical regulations with more general and discursive description of the principles which underlie them [...][290]

Millett is right to acknowledge that Aelred himself has said he will mix practice and principle. This, together with the fact that there is a tendency to concentrate on sexual sins concerned with chastity, explains why the overall pattern is not as clear as that found in *Ancrene Wisse*. However, it would be misleading to suggest that this means there is no underlying structure or that it is not based on a progression of interiority. In fact, Aelred's work largely conforms with the plan that he himself sets for it. This becomes clearer once we have realised that the

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[288] Ayto and Barratt, *De Institutione*, p. xii. This is a useful summary of the contents of the Latin work, although 'physical' or 'outward' may be clearer terms than 'non-spiritual' as a description of the subject matter in the first thirteen chapters, since the issues discussed there were also intended for the good of the soul.

[289] Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the* Ancrene Wisse (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 45.

first part of the rule is 'outer' in the sense that it concerns relations with outsiders. This is even true of issues such as silence and modesty, when raised in the outer rule. They are discussed there since sins against these virtues are sins which necessarily imply the presence of another person: nakedness is only immodesty if there is someone there to see it.

Further, the opening chapter (chapter 14) of the 'inner' rule shows a stronger demarcation between sections than Georgianna would allow. This is signalled by the very first words: *Sed iam nunc audiat et intelligat uerba mea* ('But now listen and understand my words'). *Sed* indicates a turn from one subject to another, and the pleonasm of *iam nunc* emphasises the change from what was being said previously and what is being said now. Lastly, there is the invitation (subjunctive with hortative sense) to pay close attention to the words to follow: *audiat et intelligat uerba mea.*[291] As the chapter progresses, Aelred will introduce rhetorical flourishes to increase the sense that this chapter, rather than simply teaching, is positioned at this point in the text as an 'event'. It exists not so much for the sake of the information it imparts as for the attention it draws to itself, and in doing so it acts as a marker between one section of the text and another. An example will help to illustrate this. First, let us look at a representative passage of Aelred's usual style:

> *Panni linei candidi tuum illud ornent altare, qui castitatem suo candore commendent, et simplicitatem praemonstrent.*

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[290] Bella Millett, 'The Genre of *Ancrene Wisse*' in Yoko Wada (ed.), *A Companion to* Ancrene Wisse (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 29-44, at p. 34.

[291] Basil Pennington, in *The Works of Aelred of Rievaulx Volume One: Treatises, The Pastoral Prayer*, ed. Basil Pennington (Spencer, Mass., 1971), p. 62, draws attention to the fact that these words also echo the opening of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. This is another sign that we have a key textual 'event' here.

> Your altar should be covered with white linen cloths. Their whiteness will betoken chastity and display simplicity.[292]

Some of the syntactical inversions here would seem strange if translated directly into English, but this is perfectly idiomatic medieval Latin. It is a simple instruction, glossed with an equally straightforward symbolism. Much of the text is like this: it is after all written in order to provide practical instruction for how the anchoresses are to live their daily lives, physically and spiritually. Compare this kind of writing with sentences drawn from chapter 14, the beginning of the Inner Rule:

> *Voluntarium hoc sacrificium est, oblatio spontanea, ad quam non lex impellit, non necessitas cogit, non urget praeceptum [...] Cogita semper quam pretiosum thesaurum in quam fragili portes uasculo, et quam mercedem, quam gloriam, quam coronam, uirginitas seruata ministret; quam insuper poenam, quam confusionem, quam damnationem importet amissa, indesinenter animo reuolue.*
>
> This is a free sacrifice, a spontaneous offering: it is not made obligatory by any law, there is no compulsion, no commandment imposes it [...] Bear in mind always what a precious treasure you bear in how fragile a vessel and what a reward, what glory, what a crown the preservation of your virginity will bring you. In addition remember unceasingly what punishment, what shame, what condemnation the loss of it will involve.[293]

In the context of Aelred's style elsewhere in the text, these are significant rhetorical flourishes. The first sentence quoted is replete with insistent parallel phrases, first positive (*voluntarium sacrificium* paralleled by *oblatio spontanea*) and then negative (*non lex impellit, non necessitas cogit, non iurget praeceptum*). These do little to augment the meaning but much to emphasise the point. The second sentence is equally carefully constructed, something which the English translation above is powerless to demonstrate. The common word *quam* is made the source of an unfolding stream of rhetorical patternings. It functions first to set up an opposition between *thesaurus* and *fragilis uasculum*, but is then used to

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[292] Latin text from Hoste and Talbot, §26, p. 657. English translation from Pennington, p. 72.
[293] Latin text from Hoste and Talbot, §14, p. 650. English translation from Pennington, p. 62.

create anaphora on *merces*, *gloria*, *corona*. This in turn is then opposed by a further anaphora on *poena*, *confusio*, *damnatio*. There may even be a hint of wordplay in *confusio*, which not only means 'confusion' and 'trouble', but also glances at the sense 'mingling, union', the sexual sin which constantly imperils virginal virtue. This chapter is not a unique instance of Aelred's rhetorical style. since it can be found elsewhere in the text as well, but its presence here is significant. In an era when an author might have little control over the *mise-en-page* of his text in subsequent manuscript copies, it was important for him to embed such verbal and stylistic markers within a text in order to make them the more easily navigable by readers. It matters little whether Aelred managed to stick to this division faithfully throughout his text (although, as I am arguing here and below, I believe he did so to a greater degree than critics such as Georgianna realise). The important point is that the writing here shows his *intention* to structure the text in this way, and as such it proves that he thought of it in terms of a progression from outer to inner. This is radically different from the structure into which the *Ancrene Wisse* later puts much of the same material.

In order to appreciate the change from Outer to Inner, it is also important to realise that as Aelred goes on to revisit physical topics (such as virginity, food and drink and sleep) his focus is now not on the relation that these imply with other men and women, but with the body as a dwelling place and prize for Christ. It is this different relation that generates the difference between Outer and Inner Rules. Inevitably, then, there is cross-over of subject matter but in our reading of the text we should not allow this to obscure the development of focus inwards.

If, therefore, there is evidence that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* was capable of thinking of his text in what might be called macro-spatial terms, arranging the sections of his work so as to provide a reading experience that is analogous to spatial progression from outer to inner, it would come as no surprise to find him doing something similar on a smaller scale, by using images of space to illustrate the points that he wishes to make. It is to this that I now turn.

The second opposition in *Ancrene Wisse*, that of up/down, is not foregrounded by the author in the same way as that of inner/outer, and it can be seen as less particular to this text, more an apparently universal way of categorising thoughts and ascribing relative values to them.[294] Nevertheless, it is the more prominent strategy in generating landscape imagery, and it is especially prominent in the Third and Fourth Parts of the text. Progress in the anchoritic life is on several occasions likened to progress up a hill, notably in the opening words of the Fourth Part (f. 47b, 21-7). The higher up the hill the anchoresses are, the closer they are to heaven and the further from the sinful world, an image which makes a difficult spiritual battle (an 'up-hill struggle') rewarding. Yet the author goes on to finesse this image by pointing out that, just as when climbing a real hill one encounters stronger winds nearer the top, so the anchoresses will be more strongly buffeted by the winds of temptation as they go on in their reclusive life. The author does not dwell on this, moving rapidly and fluidly into an illustration from bodily sickness, but it seems to reappear later in the Fourth Part (f. 52a, 7-10). The question at issue is why or whether anchoresses, despite their

[294] See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, pp. 17-18.

progress in a life of spiritual perfection, should still be subject to temptations. Once again, the author turns to a metaphor of landscape in order to explain:

> Þeos wiðeriwines [...] folhið us on hulles. ant weitið i wildernesse hu ha us mahen hearmin. Hul þat is heh lif. þer þe deoflessawz ofte beoð strengest. Wildernesse is anlich lif of ancre wununge. [p.100-1]
>
> These beasts [...] follow us amongst the hills and lurk in the wilderness [to see] how they can harm us. The hill is the high life where the Devil's attacks are often strongest. The wilderness is the solitary life of the anchoress's dwelling.

The hills are again equated to the 'high life' of the anchoress's special spiritual calling, and to this is now added the wilderness as a metaphor for her solitary life.

The idea of hills and wilderness has been prepared earlier, in the Third Part (f. 44a, 5-9), where the anchoresses are exhorted to follow the example of Christ, who withdrew to the hills to pray.[295] The author interprets the withdrawal from human society literally, but also gives a spiritual meaning to ascent:

> we schule turne bi us seolf ant climben wið him on hulles. þat is þenchen hehe ant leauen lahe under us alle eorðliche þohtes[.] [p. 84]
>
> We must turn on our own and climb with him in the hills, that is, think high thoughts and leave low beneath us all earthly thoughts.

By selecting these three instances where progress of the kind that the writer wants for the anchoresses is likened to movement up a hill, it would be easy to give the impression that this image is foregrounded or used as the dominant image in this section of the text, or even in the text as a whole. Such an impression would be misleading, since the hill only serves to illustrate the stage that the writer's argument has reached at that point. Moreover, between these

[295] The author would have verses such as Matthew 14.23, Mark 6.46 and Luke 6.12 in mind.

three instances there are long passages where other images (or none at all) are used. We do the writer an injustice if we tie him to one image or even set of images rather than to the chain of his thought. Since it is the thought that drives the text, it is part of his skill that he is able to pick up the same image at various points in the discussion, develop it in such a way that it can function as illustration, explanation, delightful relief and mnemonic.

Furthermore, the very recurrence of the hill imagery in spite of its illustrative, almost casual (rather than central, structural) use suggests that it was one of the fundamental ways in which the author thought of his subject. As Hasenfratz notes, 'Part Six is filled with images of climbing from lower to higher', and it is almost at the end of this part that the image of the hill is taken up once again and given a radical twist.[296] The writer has spent most of the Sixth Part describing the sufferings that the anchoresses will have to undergo on a daily basis in their immured lives, and the penitential value that such sufferings have for them. Just at the point where these pains are to lead on to the supreme virtue of love (in the Seventh Part), the hill imagery recurs, this time drawn from Song of Songs 2.8:

> Mi leof kimeð leapinde ha seið o þe dunes <overleapinde hulles. Dunes bitacneth theo the leadeth hechhest lif; hulles beoth the lachhere>. [Tolkien p. 193-4, Hasenfratz p. 372]
>
> 'My love comes leaping', she says, 'on the hills, <leaping over the mountains.' Mountains represent those who lead the highest life; hills are the lower [ones].>

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[296] Hasenfratz, p. 460. The passage from *Ancrene Wisse* that I discuss here is at f. 103a. 3-22 in the Corpus MS. However, Corpus omits two lines that are found in other MSS. including the Cleopatra MS. (British Library Cotton Cleopatra C.vi). Words supplied from this MS. are quoted from Hasenfratz's edition, and placed within caret brackets (<>).

Whilst there is clearly continuity here with the earlier images, there are also notable changes. Firstly, whereas the (implied) contrast was previously between those who were progressing up the 'hul' and those who were left behind on sheltered lower ground (plain or valley), here it is between the 'hulles' and 'dunes'. In the earlier cases, the hill was associated with those who were receiving approbation, yet now the hills represent those who lead a lower life. The original image has been extended, or rather the audience is now being shown a different section from the continuum of one image, a progression from the low ground (the unspiritual), to hills (those who have made some progress in the spiritual life) to mountains (the spiritually most advanced).

Yet the image has also undergone a more radical transformation, since instead of merely being travellers up a hill, the anchoresses are now positively identified with the hills (or, as it may be, mountains) themselves. Christ as lover comes leaping to his earthly lovers: those who are strong enough in their faith will be able to support his weight, and on these he will tread, which will produce the pain of suffering but also the footprint or mark that shows he has been there, present with them. The lower hills are those who are not so strong or so far advanced in their faith, and he will leap over these without allowing them the privilege of being stepped on. In this way, many if not all of the ideas that were involved in the earlier uses of the hill image are connected with each other here. Christ is present, but now his prayerful withdrawal to a hill is transformed to the exuberance of a lover; the earlier trials of temptation, which when found in the life of an Anchoress were a puzzle that required explanation, are now echoed in the trials of pain and suffering that are re-interpreted as causes for celebration,

and as the former were signs of spiritual progress, so the latter are a lover's reward for faithfulness. This final appearance of the hill, then, caps and transfigures the work done by the same imagery earlier in the text. The story of that image is one part of the progression that takes place through the text, but it is not the story of the text as a whole. By understanding this, we can appreciate the power, but also the limits, of the role of images (including landscape images) in structuring the text.

Hills are the most common landscape images in *Ancrene Wisse*, but by no means the only ones. Towards the end of the Second Part (f. 29a 16-25), the writer compares the whole world to a stream against which his audience must row, each anchoress being conceived of as having her own boat, presumably her soul:[297]

> for alle we beoð i þis stream, i þe worldes wode weater þe bereð adun monie. Sone se we eauer wergið ant resteð us i slawðe, ure bat geað hindward. (f. 29a, 19-22)
>
> For all of us are in this stream, in the wild water of the world, which bears many down. As soon as ever we slacken and relax in sloth, our boat goes backwards.

In his edition, Hasenfratz glosses 'bereð adun monie' as 'pulls many under'.[298] Whilst this interpretation is possible, and would be a further instance of the up/down opposition so prevalent in the landscape imagery of the text, another is also possible, which may suggest an even richer use of imagery. If both of the sentences quoted above are taken together, the threat that if we slack in our efforts 'ure bat geað hindward' makes it clear that the threat is of being swept off

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[297] It is possible that 'our boat' refers not to the individual soul but to the community of believers, but the inclusive 'ure' used with the singular 'bat' need not be read in this way: it could simply reflect the collaborative nature of the enterprise that reader and author are engaged in through the text of *Ancrene Wisse*.

downstream. This image therefore has an inevitable kinship with the later one of climbing the hill: the anchoress must go both forward and upward (water, of course, flows downhill).

In the ensuing passage, the writer has the opportunity to subvert this image by combining it with one he takes from the book of Job. There, the idea of buried treasure is used as a metaphor for heaven, to advance the argument that increasing proximity to the desired object brings with it an increased excitement and anticipation. Yet clearly, digging down for treasure and ascending to heaven are activities that proceed in opposite directions. So the effort and the emotions associated with digging are then transferred to straining in the opposite direction: 'for þi ne þurue 3e nawt deluen dunewardes. ah heouen uppart þe heorte for þat is þe uprowunge a3ein þis worldes stream.' (f. 29b 1-3) (Therefore do not strive to dig downwards, but lift up the heart, for that is rowing against the stream of this world). This image, wherein digging for treasure is transmuted into an upward movement, contains a disjunctive tension which could be explored, if the writer so wished. To do so would emphasise the incommensurate nature of language, and exponents of the *via negativa*, such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, would make much of this.[299] That such an opportunity is passed over here shows something of the different way in which the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* wanted to use imagery.

The watery idea of the world recurs (amplified from a stream to a sea) in the middle of the Fourth Part (f. 65b, 3-7). Here, however, the anchoresses are

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[298] Hasenfratz, p. 147.

no longer in the midst of the waters but 'ouer þis worldes sea up o þe brugge of heouene' ('over this world's sea, up on the bridge of heaven'). There remains, to be sure, a danger that by paying too close attention to the pains they experience in this world (conceived of as shadows of the pains of hell), they may be frightened and fall off the bridge, yet essentially this passage does not place them in such direct and continual conflict with the world as the earlier one did. This again underlines the manner in which such images are used, namely as illustrations designed to gain our sympathy for the angle at which an issue is being discussed at that moment, rather than as thoroughgoing or totalising allegory. Even where the incommensurate nature of the image is not openly subverted (as was the case in delving as a means of rising), cross-references show that the writer's thought was more flexible than that.

Again, it is important to underline the fact that imagery (especially landscape imagery) in the *Ancrene Wisse* is used in the service of the moral or practical teaching that the author wishes to convey, rather than being a structuring principle that my necessarily selective reading of the text might imply. Rather, the use of landscape imagery is one more expression of a principle of organisation that Dennis Rygiel has identified in connection with the hypotactic style found in the celebrated depiction of Christ as lover-knight in Part Seven:

> The writer wants connectedness felt, not analysed. For he is trying to move his audience, not prove abstract truths to them. Thus connections are continually being

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[299] *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson, EETS OS 218 (1944).

> made, but only in rather unobtrusive ways [...] [C]ohesion in this part of the passage is primarily a function of word and phrase being repeated across sentence boundaries.[300]

These words would apply equally well to the use of landscape imagery, such as the hill, as would Rygiel's characterisation of the process of the lover-knight allegory: 'repetition with significant variation and development'. The imagery and syntax of *Ancrene Wisse* both show the same method of organising thought, but working over different distances within the text.

The *Ancrene Wisse* is a remarkable survival from a period when writing in English is very scarce. It is part of a group of texts (*Ancrene Wisse*, *Hali Meiðhad*, *Sawles Ward*, *Seinte Marherete*, *Seinte Iuliene* and *Seinte Katherine*) that share a remarkably consistent written language, a fact first noted by J. R. R. Tolkien, who designated this the 'AB language'.[301] This name derives from the manuscript sigla for MS CCCC 402 (*A*, which contains a copy of *Ancrene Wisse*) and MS Bodley 34 (*B*, which contains the other five texts in this group, known collectively as the Katherine Group).[302] Tolkien argued that such consistency pointed to these texts being the work of one school or scriptorium, where a linguistic standard was developed and prevailed.[303] Other scholars have noted the recurrence of particular (alliterative) phrases, in similar contexts, amongst the texts of the Katherine Group, but the considerable scholarly attention paid to the

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[300] Dennis Rygiel, 'The Allegory of Christ the Lover-Knight in Ancrene Wisse: An Experiment in Stylistic Analysis', *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 343-64, at 346-7.

[301] See his seminal article '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*', *Essays and Studies* 14 (1929), 104-126. His view has since received some qualification: for a very useful summary of recent scholarship on the issue, see Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and* Ancrene Wisse (Oxford, 1992), pp. 164-5.

[302] The latter manuscript is available in facsimile. See *Facsimile of MS. Bodley 34*, with an introduction by N.R. Ker, EETS OS 247 (Oxford, 1960).

[303] '[I]t is far and away the most probable deduction that A and B are substantially in the very language of the original works, and belong to the same place and at least approximately the same

question of whether these texts are by the same author has been unable to decide the question finally.[304] At the very least, it can safely be said that these texts share a highly consistent language, found only in these two manuscripts.

This linguistic unity, together with the fact that the Katherine Group exists between the covers of one codex, is also suggestive of the audience for which these texts, or at least these manuscripts, were produced. Their common concerns are the female spiritual life, its protection from sin and temptation, and especially the preservation of chastity. These facts, taken together, have led scholars to propose that these six texts were all intended, if not all at the time of their original composition, then substantially in the form in which they were collected together, copied and now survive to us, for reading by an audience of anchorites.[305] If this is true then all six of them are, in a sense, anchoritic texts, proceeding from the same milieu and designed for the same use as the *Ancrene Wisse* itself. For this reason, I now turn to examine the spatial and landscape aspects of these five texts.

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time as those works and their authors (or author). To a linguist they are, in other words, virtually originals.' (Tolkien, '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*', 112.)

[304] One of the most ground-breaking studies in illuminating the genesis of the AB texts has been E.J. Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford, 1976), but see also Bella Millett, 'Origins of *Ancrene Wisse*: New Answers, New Questions', *Medium Ævum* 61 (1992), 206-28. Besides this and the article by Tolkien mentioned above, the most helpful discussions of issues relating to the language, authorship and origins of these texts are to be found in some of their most recent editions. See especially *Þe Liflade ant to Passiun of Seinte Iuliene*, ed. S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne, EETS OS 248 (1961); *Hali Meiðad*, ed. Bella Millett, EETS OS 284 (1982); and *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 vols, EETS os 325 (2005) and 326 (2006), II.ix-xxix. All quotations from *Hali Meiðhad* are from Millett's edition; references are to page/line number.

[305] Tolkien is careful to underline that 'the linguistic character of the texts does not oblige us to believe in a common author. Where two different scribes could write a common language in the same spelling, two different authors could conceivably have written under the influence of a common training, reading, and tradition' (117). However many authors were involved, the unity of language, subject matter and outlook is strikingly suggestive of a common origin, in place if not in author.

The Katherine Group can be further divided into two sub-groups. Three of the texts within it are hagiographical, being 'free translations from Latin sources'[306] of the lives of SS. Julian, Katherine and Margaret.[307] These three lives are especially appropriate for an anchoritic audience, as their narratives centre around questions of sexual morality for single women, and their choice to preserve their chastity rather than compromise their faith.

Within these three *vitae*, it is possible to discern recurrent patterns of spatial organisation, settings that are repeatedly used for certain types of scene within the narrative. All three legends, deriving from much older texts in Latin and Greek, are set in the countries of the early church: *Katerine* in Alexandria, *Iuliene* in Nicomedia (modern-day Izmit) and *Marherete* in Antioch. These locations are both familiar and exotic to an educated twelfth-century audience. They are familiar from sources such as the Bible, chronicles of the Crusades, and the tales of Alexander the Great (one of the 'matters' of medieval literature, along with King Arthur, Charlemagne and Troy).[308] At the same time, they are outside Christendom, or at its disputed borders, and therefore represent an alien culture for religious recluses in western England. This is, of course, necessary for the plots, since women could only be in danger of death for their Christian faith under an anti-Christian regime. However, it also encourages an

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[306] Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, p. xiii.
[307] Frances M. Mack, ed., *Seinte Marherete þe Meiden ant Martyr*, EETS OS 193 (1934); *Seinte Katerine: Re-Edited from MS Bodley and the other Manuscripts*, eds S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson, EETS SS 7 (1981); d'Ardenne, *Seinte Iuliene*. All quotations from these texts are taken from these editions, with references given to line number, or in the case of *Marherete*, page and line number. Translations into Modern English are mine. To avoid confusion, when referring to these saints as characters within these texts, I use modern spellings and Roman type (e.g. Julian); when referring to a text as a whole, I use Middle English spellings and italic type (e.g. *Iuliene*).
[308] The connection with Alexander is made very clear in *Katerine*, where the location of the story is 'þe moder-burh of Alixandres riche' ('the mother-city of Alexander's kingdom', 16-17).

identification between opposing intellectual or spiritual views on the one hand and opposing geographical areas on the other. This is most clearly expressed in *Katerine*, which takes place against the backdrop of a struggle for control over the Roman Empire between Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, and his rival Maxentius.[309] In the opening passages of this text, we learn that Maxentius has been defeated but, contrary to history, not killed by Constantine, and he flees into Alexandria. Thus from the beginning of the narrative an opposition is set up between these two men, an opposition which is expressed not only in military terms but also in defining each of them by their Christian or anti-Christian positions, and by their geographical locations. Once he is emperor, Constantine is identified with Rome, seat of historical empire but also (for the first audience of the English *Katerine*) of present-day papal power and Christian orthodoxy. This city and its ruler stand in contradistinction to the heathen Maxentius in Alixandria. The stage is set for conflict between Christian and heathen and the issue of place has been used to underline this.

Such a prologue of conflict is especially appropriate here, since of these three heroines Katherine is the only one who initiates the battle against the heathen. Again, this is expressed in spatial terms. She is outraged at the command to public worship of Maxentius' heathen gods, and goes to challenge him and his order. In doing so, she travels from her own home (considerable emphasis has been placed on this building, as part of the estate she inherited from her deceased parents, and which she has managed in an exemplary manner) to

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[309] For a full account of this dimension to the legend, see d'Ardenne and Dobson, *Katerine*, pp. 204-5. It may be significant in explaining why these three saints' lives were chosen for this collection to note that in the transmission of the Katherine legend, Maxentius was confused with Maximinus, the Emperor on the throne in the narrative of Julian.

the heathen temple. As so often with spatial references in these texts, this makes perfect narrative sense, but narrative logic is not enough to explain what happens and why in this text, and a purely logical/historical interpretation of the story quickly finds gaps in it.[310] The artistry of such a text lies in creating plausible narratives which also work on a symbolic level, and one of the ways in which this is expressed is through setting. Katherine is moving from her own house (and, as I shall argue below, houses have a particular resonance in this group of texts and amongst an anchoritic audience) and into enemy territory. Moreover, the temple is an important if incidental motif elsewhere in these legends: Olibrius sees, desires and kidnaps Margaret when he is on his way to Antioch 'to herien i þe hehe burh hise heþene godes' ('to praise his heathen gods in the capital', 6/6-7), presumably at their temple.

All three saints also move in noble circles: Margaret is the daughter of Theodosie, 'of þet heþene folc patriarche ant prince' ('patriarch and prince of that heathen people', 4/16-17); Katherine is 'anes kinges, Cost hehte, anlepi dohter, icuret clergesse' ('a choice scholar, the only daughter of a king called Cost', 25-6); and Julian is sought as a bride by Eleusius, who rises to be 'under Maximien hehest i Rome' ('most senior in Rome after [Emperor] Maximien', 60). High birth is a common feature in hagiography, but the fact that these three women are all seen in the context of the nobility may suggest something about the anchoresses to whom these tales were addressed, at least in the collection of MS. Bodley 34. In spite of their good connections, Katherine is the only one of

[310] For example: why does Katherine need to send a messenger to find out what is causing the commotion in the streets, if Maxentius' orders about coming to offer sacrifice in the temple have been proclaimed 'se wide se þet lont wes' (17-18)? If worship of other gods offends Katherine so much, why has she not protested in the temple on other days?

these saints to initiate the conflict at their centre. Margaret and Julian are given no such choice, but are forced into confrontation by the actions of others. In both cases, the attack comes in the form of a man who desires her. For Julian, the man is Eleusius, friend both to the Emperor and to Julian's father. and she is thus threatened by political, sexual and paternal powers all at once. It is notable. and perhaps significant, that none of these three women has a mother still alive who features in their stories, although Margaret does have a foster-mother. Margaret and Julian both have heathen fathers, but Katherine is an orphan. This makes each of them isolated, and potentially cut off from the normal social relations that defined young women in the period when MS. Bodley 34 was written. In this sense, each of the three is in a position analogous to that of an anchoress.

The threat to Margaret's chastity comes from the heathen 'shireue' of the land, Olibrius, who sees her tending sheep and desires her for his wife. He gives orders to his men to abduct her, and attempts to force her to sleep with him. Her situation at the time of her abduction is a good example of the pervasive, and subtle, idea that these women exist simultaneously within and without the heathen culture of their enemies, in the world but not of it. In Margaret's case. this is set up by means of several small details, relating to her family, and to her geographical position. As regards her family, she is the natural daughter of a heathen father (and presumably a heathen mother). This establishes her in a non-Christian context, but she is also distanced from it by the fact that her mother has died, and her father sends her away to be brought up (not because of her mother's death: that occurs afterwards – see 4/17-21). The place to which she is sent is also significant: 'a burh [...] from þe muchele Antioch fiftene milen' ('a town [...]

fifteen miles from the great Antioch'). This places here near the local heathen capital, but not within it. Once again, she is on the edge of her society, simultaneously a part of and yet separated from it. In this, she has much in common with an anchoress.

These two motifs of familial and spatial isolation are combined at the point where Olibrius sees Margaret for the first time:

> As he wende his wei, seh þis seli meiden Margarete, as ha wes ant wiste up o þe feld hire foster-modres schep, þe schimede ant schan al of wlite ant of westume. (6/9-12)
>
> As he went on his way, he saw this holy maiden Margaret, as she was tending her foster-mother's sheep, who [or 'which'] dazzled and shone in appearance and form.

The activity of tending the sheep suggests (although it admittedly does not require) a rural setting for this incident, which would set it in contrast with the heathen worship taking place in the nearby town. More definitely, it invites a parallel with stock images from Christian thought, of the role of the 'pastor' derived from descriptions of God and the kings of Israel as shepherds, and of course supremely of Christ as the Good Shepherd.[311] The syntax here seems deliberately artful, turning on the interpretation of 'þe' and seeming at first to attribute the beautiful and dazzling qualities of Margaret to the sheep as well, perhaps in an echo of Jesus as spotless lamb, or the purity required of his followers/flock. This ambiguity is resolved in the audience's mind by the end of the sentence, but the fact that it is created in the process of reading helps to introduce these ideas as a cluster. In any case, it is noteworthy that the outsider figure from the family, namely the foster-mother, is indirectly responsible for

[311] For God as shepherd see Genesis 48.15; for the kings of Israel see 2 Samuel 7.7, Zecheriah 11.17; for Christ as the Good Shepherd, see John 10.14.

placing Margaret in this context to begin with. This not only emphasises the feminine dimension to the anchoritic spirituality embodied in this group of texts, but also anticipates the key verse for the penultimate text in MS Bodley 34, *Hali Meiðhad*, with its call to 'for3et ti folc ant tines feader hus' (forget your people and your father's house', 1/5). This is precisely what all three of these saints are called to do.

One of the most striking features of *Marherete* is that, even ignoring the fact that Margaret is imprisoned at the end of her first dialogue with Olibrius, only to be brought out again the next day (a few lines later), almost half of the narrative takes place within a prison. Given the likely audience for *Marharete* in MS Bodley 34, the parallel between the prison and the anchorhold is striking. Margaret's prison is referred to by a number of different words and phrases. It is sometimes called a 'cwarterne' ('prison', 10/3), or the 'dorkest wan' ('darkest dwelling', 18/21), but most often a 'cwal(m)-hus' ('prison/torture chamber', 10/3, 18/19, 20/17, 28/30). As I shall examine below, the concept of a 'hus' is important throughout this group of texts as an interpretation of, and commentary on the idea of, an anchorhold and life within it. It is therefore highly significant that the most common term used to describe the prison is one that includes this element. This, together with the use of 'wan' elsewhere, places emphasis on the prison as a place in which to live and dwell. It is here that Margaret spends most of her time in the narrative; here that she battles with demons and temptation; here that she learns (rather improbably, from the mouth of a demon) not only how maidens are tempted but how they may most effectively resist that

temptation. All of these are activities that would also be expected to characterise the life of an anchoress inside her anchorhold.

Other details in the text also encourage us to interpret the prison in terms of the anchorhold. I have mentioned above that most of the parents in these narratives are dead or hostile, but the one exception is Margaret's foster-mother, an important minor figure in the tale as has already been seen, and who cares for her during her imprisonment:

> Hire uostermoder wes an þet frourede hire, ant com to þe cwalm-hus ant brohte hire to fode bred ant burnes drunch, þet ha bi liuede. Heo, þa, and monie ma biheolden þurh an eilþurl as ha bed hire beoden. (20/16-20)
>
> Her fostermother was one of those who looked after her, and came to the prison and brought her bred for food and a drink from the spring, by which she stayed alive. Then she and many others watched through a window as she said her prayers.

This is clearly a model for the proper relationship between an anchoress and those in her local community upon whose support she depends.[312] They provide her with what she needs to survive, and in turn her virtue acts as a model and conduit of holiness for those around her.[313] The link between the two locations is further strengthened in this group of texts by the use in the passage above of the word 'eilþurl' (literally, 'eye-hole'), the same term used in *Ancrene Wisse* to describe the window of the anchorhold.[314] In itself, this is perhaps not remarkable, although the word is not common outside of these texts. However,

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[312] Compare the following directions from the Eighth part of the *Ancrene Wisse*: 'nan ancre ne ah to neomen bute meaðfulliche þet hire to neodeð' ('no anchoress ought to accept other than in moderation what she needs', f. 112a/18-19); 'Ed gode men neomeð al þet ow to nedeð' ('Accept all that you need from good men', f. 112b/18).

[313] It is in this spirit that the *Ancrene Wisse* likens anchoresses to the 'nihtfuhel', which lives under the eaves of the church, 'for þi [...] þet ha understonden þet ha ahen to beon of se hali lif þet al hali chirche þet is cristene folc leonie ant wreoíe up on ham' ('because they understand that they ought to be of such holy life that all of Holy Church, that is, Christian people, lean and trust upon them', f. 38b/26-f. 39a/1).

[314] f. 12b/20.

in the passage from *Ancrene Wisse*, it is also used in a context where its meaning floats between 'window' and 'eye',[315] a form of word-play which suggests that it caught the imagination of the author, and was an important part of his understanding of the relationship between an anchoress and her dwelling. If this is the case, it is all the more interesting that the same word should recur here.

One final reason for reading Margaret's prison as an anchorhold is the recurrence of prison-imagery throughout *Ancrene Wisse*. The anchoress is enjoined to pray for those in prison, especially those in prison for their faith (f. 8a/7-12), and Eve is described as having been imprisoned for over four thousand years in hell (f. 14a/5-10). More importantly, there are two extended *exempla* using the same image of the prison. The first (f. 34a/17-34b/19) reworks an idea from Matthew 18.21-35 about sin as a debt, and the importance of cancelling the debt that others owe to oneself because of their sin, since one's own far greater debt has been paid, releasing one from prison. The writer comments 'O þis ilke wise we beoð alle i prisun her' ('In this same way we are all in prison here', f. 34a/23-4), inviting the anchoresses to identify themselves as people in prison, although admittedly he does this on the grounds of their common fallen humanity rather than their status as solitaries.

Shortly afterwards, a further important use is made of the prison image, this time to explain the relationship between the body and the soul: 'ha is her in uncuððe iput in a prisun bitund in a cwalm hus' ('she [sc. the soul] is here in the unknown, put in a prison, enclosed in a torture chamber', f. 38b/9-10). It is the

[315] See Georgianna, *Solitary Self*, pp. 61-2.

soul rather than the anchoress who is imagined as the prisoner here, but the point of the argument at this stage is that the solitary should not allow her soul to become sullied by the flesh: it is the soul she must value and see as the most precious, most essential part of herself. In this sense, the soul *is* the anchoress, and as the soul is imprisoned in the body and seeks to be free from it, the anchoress is enclosed in the anchorhold as a means of separating herself from the physical, earthly world. In addition, we see once again that one of the words used for prison here is 'cwalm hus', a further link with Margaret and her incarceration.

Besides the saints lives, the other two texts in the Katherine Group, *Hali Meiðhad* and *Sawles Ward*, are sometimes referred to as 'homilies',[316] and they follow the pattern one might expect from a homily inasmuch as they open with a Biblical text from which the ensuing argument is derived, however speciously. Yet for all their direct rhetorical and emotional appeal, they are perhaps as usefully (and less confusingly) designated simply as 'treatises', emphasising their written, rather than oral, nature.[317] Their primary function is to exhort and warn the reader/hearer away from spiritual dangers, and in this they share much with certain passages from *Ancrene Wisse*. It follows, therefore, that within these two texts landscape plays a very minor role, similar to its function as already observed in *Ancrene Wisse*. However, in each case there are striking examples

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[316] So Tolkien, '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*', 107, and d'Ardenne, *Seinte Iuliene*, p. xv.

[317] This is not to ignore the fact that not all homilies were written to be given orally, but the use of the word 'treatise' avoids any ambiguity of this kind. Moreover, an emphasis on 'written-ness' can be justified from the texts themselves. The author of *Hali Meiðhad* refers to it as 'þis writ' (19/2), which Millett glosses as 'letter, treatise'. Earlier in the text we find the phrase 'ha beoð iscrippet ut of liues writ in heouene' (they are scratched out of the *liues writ* in heaven', 12/5), where *liues writ* in context must be the Book of Life or *liber vitae* of Revelation 3.4-5, as Millett also notes.

of ways in which a landscape image or set of images is used not only to structure thought, but to make it memorable, and thus to advance the didactic and pastoral aims of the texts.

Hali Meiðhad is a spirited and vivid argument in favour of virginity, including in the process a portrait of married sexual life that is as damning (which was to be expected) as it is vivid, entertaining and, for all its vituperative exaggeration, recognisable (which was not). It has been described by Bella Millett in her edition as a text with a 'harshly dualistic world-view'.[318] Millett goes on to remind us that such a dualism of 'this world and the next was often described by Christian writers in terms of the historical rivalry of Babylon and Jerusalem.'[319] In the opening passages of the text, the writer proceeds to interpret his Biblical head-text (Psalm 44.11) as a call to virginity.[320] He glosses *populum tuum* as 'þe gederunge inwið þe of fleschliche þonkes' ('the gathering within you of fleshly thoughts', 1/16-17), and goes on to take this idea even further:

> Þis is Babilones folc, þe deofles here of helle, þet is umbe forte leaden into þe worldes þeowdom Syones dohter.
>
> These are the people of Babylon, the devil's army of hell, which is intent on leading Sion's daughter into the world's servitude. (p. 2, lines 1-3)[321]

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[318] Millett, *Hali Meiðhad*, p. xxvi.

[319] Millett, *Hali Meiðhad*, p. xxvii. Millett rightly draws attention to Augustine's commentary on the Psalms as one of the most forceful uses of this idea, but the Biblical locus classicus for the idea was from the climax of the book of Revelation. Here, it is the fall of Babylon (representing everything opposed to God) in chapter 18 that paves the way for the new Jerusalem (God's kingdom) in chapter 21.

[320] In the analysis that follows, I take *Hali Meiðhad* as being an original composition in the form that now survives. It is heavily indebted to earlier texts for its ideas, and sometimes follows them very closely for long passages, but their precise combination as found in the English text is unique, and it is this that forms the object of my study here. For a detailed discussion of sources and how they are used, see Millett, *Hali Meiðhad*, pp. xlv-lii.

[321] All quotes from *Hali Meiðhad* are from Millett's edition, but the square brackets around her emendations / words supplied from the other manuscript are silently omitted here. Numbers refer to page/line; translations into modern English are mine, with reference to the glossary provided

The next step in this argument is a bold one, but follows in a long interpretative tradition. The author turns attention to the precise meaning of 'Sion', a question which admitted of many answers.[322] In the sentence quoted above, Sion seems clearly to refer to the city of Jerusalem, thus making a balanced opposition to the city of Babylon. However, this is not the interpretation subsequently made by the author himself. Instead, he identifies it as only part of the city, not the mountain on which it stands but 'þe hehe tur of Ierusalem' ('the high tower of Jerusalem', 2/4). In support of this explanation, the writer states that '"Syon" seið ase muchel on Englische ledene ase "heh sihðe"' ('In the English language, "Sion" means "high place"', 2/5). There is one final piece of hermeneutic legerdemain: 'Ant bitacneð þis tur þe hehnesse of meiðhad' ('And this tower symbolises the highness of maidenhood', 2/6).

The result of this chain of ideas and interpretations is the creation of a specific landscape picture. It is this picture to which the opening passages have been leading, and which the following ones will elaborate. Thus the teaching of the opening part of the text is anchored around one landscape image, as a visual *aide-memoire*. The reader has only to think of a tower to envisage herself as safe, secure and protected from the world around her, which is by implication lower and, according to the rule we have already observed in *Ancrene Wisse*, of less moral and spiritual worth.

The choice of a tower for this purpose is suggestive in a number of ways. In the first place, it should be noted that there is a similarity between the tower

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by Millett. For a more idiomatic but sometimes less literal translation, see Millett and Wogan-

and the anchorhold. This similarity has less to do with height (most anchorholds seem to have been at ground level) than with seclusion (at least in theory). Towers were built as dwellings but also places of refuge and defence against attack. In the same way, the anchorhold is a place to live, but also a refuge from a sinful world, and a defence against the attacks that sin or sinful culture might make against one's virtue. Given this, it is arguable that the tower is a particularly appropriate image for a writer to be using if he has an anchoritic audience in mind.

Secondly, there is the question of what contemporary resonance a tower might have had for the writer and his original audience. Like the rest of the Katherine Group, *Hali Meiðhad* was probably written somewhere in the first two decades of the thirteenth century. Over the previous century and a half, castles had been built all over the country as part of the establishment of Norman power over the kingdom. At first, these castles were a simple motte-and-bailey type, but once the original network had been established, these castles were gradually upgraded to the stone-keep design. In both types of design, as in new the concentric style, which was being introduced to Europe in the thirteenth century, the focus was on a central tower, the dominant feature of the castle.[323] In this

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Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, pp. 2-43.

[322] See pp. 39-40 above.

[323] For a brief introduction to the development from each of these styles of castle to the next, see James Forde-Johnston, *A Guide to the Castles of England and Wales* (London, 1981), pp. 13-38. More in-depth scholarly perspectives on this issue, and the ways in which castles were interpreted by those contemporary to their building, are to be found in O. H. Creighton, *Castles and Landscapes in Medieval England: Power, Community and Fortification in Medieval England* (London, 2002) and Charles Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society: Fortresses in England, France and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003).

way, castles could be seen as a powerful symbol of royal power asserted over the whole country.[324]

But it was not only royal power that built castles. In fact, royal weakness was another stimulus to their construction, since when the king's control of the regions of his realm was poor, this made it easier for local barons to contest his will and power, and fortified castles were an important means of their doing so.[325] Thus under the reign of King Stephen and the Anarchy of 1135-54, baronial castle-building flourished.[326] The same seems to have been true in the reign of King John, the time when *Hali Meiðhad* is likely to have been written.[327] For this reason, castles were also a symbol of unrest and contested power. If we are to recapture the contemporary implications of such a building for a thirteenth century audience, separated from the Anarchy by only a generation or so, we need to think less in terms of stately homes, and more of something like the armoured police stations of late twentieth-century Belfast.

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[324] King John, in whose reign *Hali Meiðhad* is likely to have been written, had around sixty castles 'which were more or less permanently in royal hands', W.L. Warren, *King John*, 2nd edn. (London, 1978), p. 136. Castles could also be a symbol of heaven, as in *Cleanness* 216 'Bot þer He tynt þe tyþe dool of His toor ryche', where 'toor' seems most naturally to mean 'tower' (and not 'entourage'), which would mean that the fall of the devil and his angels results in God losing a tenth of his tower, i.e. heaven.

[325] The right to build castles was much contested in the twelfth century, and has been much discussed by modern historians. For an incisive analysis of this particular period, see Charles Coulson, 'The Castles of the Anarchy', in Edmund King, ed., *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 67-92. Whatever Stephen's role in this period, Coulson's comment draws attention to the link between castles and civil unrest: 'Even when instruments of violence (and its most noticed and durable symptom), castles were the result, not the cause, of local disturbances.' (pp. 67-8).

[326] However, Coulson's reservations about the extent to which this was exaggerated in contemporary propaganda and subsequent historiography should be noted – see 'Castles of the Anarchy', p. 72.

[327] When Magna Carta was reissued in 1217, its final provision (number 47) stipulated the razing of all *castella adulterina*, 'those castles which were constructed or rebuilt from the beginning of the war waged between the Lord King John our father and his barons of England.' (Quoted by Coulson, 'Castles of the Anarchy', p. 76.)

If the audience of *Hali Meiðhad* had any personal experience of towers, even if only from the outside, it seems likely that they would have been of this kind. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the end of the twelfth century and beginning of the thirteenth was a period of energetic cathedral building, and that a central tower is a feature far more common to cathedrals in England than anywhere else in Europe at the time. Just what sort of towers cathedrals may have had at this period is not always easy to determine, since many were changed or replaced in the later centuries of the Middle Ages. The cathedral church nearest to the putative source of *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Katherine Group, Hereford, underwent such a change. Around the end of the thirteenth century, and by the opening years of the fourteenth, new towers were being built at the crossing and west end, 'replacing Romanesque towers which had either been built or were planned in these positions'.[328] To the north-east, Worcester cathedral had a tower, probably on the west front, by 1175, but this fell down in that year. Whether there was a crossing-tower by this point is not easy to establish, but the present one was only begun in 1357.[329]

All of these contexts in which towers might have been encountered by the first audience of *Hali Meiðhad* are potentially relevant to the use of such an image here in the text. Together, they make the tower an image of piety, royalty and power, with a suggestion that it provides security in an environment of

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[328] See R.K. Morris, 'The Architectural History of the Medieval Cathedral Church', in Gerald Aylmer and John Tiller, eds, *Hereford Cathedral: A History* (London, 2000), pp. 203-40, at p. 220. The difficulty in establishing precisely what preceded these towers seems to be shown by Morris's own confusion: in the passage quoted above he is not sure whether the Romanesque towers were ever built or merely planned, but on the next page he states that 'it is likely that [the fourteenth-century crossing-tower's] predecessor had to be taken down for structural reasons'.

[329] See Nikolaus Pevsner and Priscilla Metcalf, *The Cathedrals of England: Midland, Eastern and Northern England* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 316 and p. 318.

continuous danger. This image is therefore useful to the writer illustrating the position in which his audience finds herself, since it simultaneously underlines her perceived danger and want of protection, and also suggests that the virginity which will be her refuge will also be a means of enhancing her prestige. Certainly, the language used to describe the virgin's position in these passages is as applicable to social scales as to spiritual ones. The text compares virgins with those who have lost their virginity, including wives and widows: 'þeos, ase flesches þrealles, beoð i worldes þeowdom, and wunieð lahe on eorðe' (these, as flesh's servants/slaves, are in the world's bondage, and dwell low on earth', 2/7-8). The discourse of 'þrealles', 'þeowdom' and 'lahe' carries with it a strong suggestion of social rank. By using such language, the writer is able to appeal to class concerns as much as religious ones, something that is in accordance with the elevated social status of the three saints whose lives were discussed above. The vocabulary used here in *Hali Meiðhad* enables the writer to suggest that his audience will not lose out through her choice of virginity, not because she will attain elevated social standing by doing so, but because her consequent spiritual advancement can be understood in the same terms.[330]

This social aspect of the language is then developed and combined with political ideas. The purpose of the attacks made by the 'deofles here of helle' are explained: they 'weorrið ant warpeð eauer towart tis tur forte keasten it adun, ant drahen hire into þeowdom þet stont se hehe þerin' ('continually make war against and assail this tower in order to cast it down, and draw her who stands so

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[330] This discourse is retained throughout the text, and results in one of the few spatial images besides that of the tower, at the point where the poor woman 'inwið westi wahes' ('within bare walls', 15/18) is contrasted with the 'wide wahes' ('wide walls', 15/21) of the rich (and equally unhappy) wife.

high inside it into slavery', 2/16-18). For the first audience to whom these words were addressed, an armed assault against a tower was not a thing merely from fable and story, but a contemporary political reality, within the kingdom if not within personal experience. The unrest that simmered throughout the reign of King John came to a head in the First Barons' War from 1215-17. A recurrent feature of this war was the besieging of castles such as Dover (throughout the summer of 1216), Windsor (two months in 1216) and especially Rochester (where the siege was directed in person by King John, from October to November 1216).[331] Depending on the date that one assigns to *Hali Meiðhad*, these events occurred either just after its composition, or contemporaneous with it. Either way, they are the political backdrop against which early readings of the text will have taken place, and they are a particularly powerful example of the political methods used in the world in which its early readers lived.[332] Such events and methods cannot but have shaped the ways in which this passage was read, and made the tower of virginity, as presented here, both immediately recognisable from military and current affairs, and in stark contrast to the values which they represented. In this way, the text is able to take a simple image, ultimately derived from the Bible, and make use of its contemporary resonances, borrowing from them but then transforming their significance.

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[331] For an account of the events of this war, including some of the many sieges, both royal and rebel, that featured in it, see Warren, *King John*, pp. 246-56.

[332] The sieges of this war are by no means the only ones that might have shaped responses to the image in *Hali Meiðhad*: Dover had been besieged in 1189, within living memory of early readers of the text, and Rochester would come under siege again in 1264. Nearer to the posited source of the Katherine Group, Worcester was besieged by King Stephen in 1139, as recorded by John of Worcester: see *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: Volume III*, ed. and trans. P. McGurk, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1998), pp. 274-7.

The remaining landscape images from the text are less suggestive, but most powerful when they draw on some of the themes already set in motion by the image of the tower, as elaborated above. Thus, the unhappiness of a rich wife's domestic situation, the fact that 'Hwil he bið et hame, alle þine wide wanes þuncheð þe to nearewe' ('While he [sc. your husband] is at home, all your wide dwellings seem too narrow to you', 15 25-6), seems to appeal to the same desire for social advancement that the use of 'heh' and 'lah' did in reference to the tower. There, the argument was that a life of holy virginity offered a comparable reward to that of social status; here, the point is that the privileged classes are not happy with their possessions. In both cases, the writer seeks to undermine some sort of taste for the high life which he presumes to exist in his audience.

There are other passing landscape images used briefly to illustrate the point being made, and fix it visually in the imagination and the memory of the reader. So married women know how detestable their own situation is, but are powerless to change it: 'hwa se lið i lei-fen deope besuncken, þah him þunche uuel þrof he ne schal nawt up acouerin hwen he walde' ('he who lies sunk deep into the mire, though it seems bad to him, he cannot get up out of it when he wants to', 16/9-11). This image is used here for decorative but more importantly mnemonic purposes, fixing the teaching (namely: wives hate being married but cannot end their suffering themselves, therefore do not seek to become one of them) succinctly in one mental picture. It is no coincidence that the image chosen to do this combines the opposition of up/down, found in the tower image

and throughout *Ancrene Wisse*, with the idea of physical dirt and grime, so often used as a picture of sin in these texts.

The text known to modern scholarship as *Sawles Ward* is the last and shortest of the pieces in MS. Bodley 34.[333] It is an extended allegory on the protection of the soul from vice, and shares many features with *Hali Meiðhad*. Both perceive the world as a constant source of attack; both distrust the passions and sensations of the body, considering them as something like traitors to the mind or soul; both are anti-feminist in their portrayal of women as likely to collude with the passions in overthrowing reason or virtue. There is another connection which is, for my present purposes, more important, and which concerns the texts on which each of these treatises are based. *Hali Meiðhad*'s text, from Psalm 44.11, exhorted the hearer *obliuiscere populum tuum et domum patris tui* ('forget thy people and thy father's house'). In *Sawles Ward*, the text is from Matthew 24.43: *si sciret paterfamilias qua hora fur uenturus esset, vigilaret utique et non sineret perfodi domum suam* ('if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open').

The uses to which these two verses are put are of course very different, but it is striking that both of them contain references to a *domus*. In the first verse, this is the house of the hearer's father, and she is encouraged to leave it. In the second, it is the hearer's own house, and the allegory encourages him or

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[333] All quotations taken from the edition in J.A.W. Bennet and G.V. Smithers, eds, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1974), pp. 246-61; references to this edition are by line number. I have also consulted the edition in Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, pp. 86-109.

her to protect it. To this extent, the two have little in common, yet it is worth pausing to consider the implications of the fact that, of all the verses available from the Bible, it is these two that have been chosen here, whether by one author or by a compiler who put the two texts in one codex. Given the indications that these texts were intended for an anchoritic audience, it is tempting to see the emphasis on the house (including the tower which becomes a virtuous antithesis of the godless *domus* in *Hali Meiðhad*) as being related in some way to the importance of the anchorhold in defining the anchoress's identity. After all, if her spiritual (and social) status comes from the fact of her enclosure, then it also derives in some sense from the place which provides that enclosure. A king is still a king when outside his palace, a monk is still a monk (if, according to some points of view, a bad one) when outside his monastery, but an anchoress can only be an anchoress because of her anchorhold.[334] Moreover, the pairing of these two texts provides a model of 'two houses' not unlike St. Augustine's two cities, one representing the world outside the anchorhold, and one the anchorhold itself, which becomes an extension of the body or the soul. Whenever, as in certain passages of *Ancrene Wisse*, the boundary between the world and the inside of the anchorhold is merged or intermingled with the boundary between the physical, external body and the immaterial soul, the identity of the anchoress with her home is reinforced.[335] The prominence of *domus* in both these texts links them

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[334] Georgianna, *Solitary Self*, pp. 33-4 writes of 'the precarious position of solitaries vis-à-vis the world. The anchoress is locked in a small cell attached to the side of a local church, but she is not enclosed or protected by it; she looks through one small window into the church and through another out onto the world.' Georgianna is right to make this point, but it might be better to say that the solitary is not *completely* or (better yet) not *securely* enclosed. The focus on the *domus* and especially on the *tur* can therefore be read in some sense as comforting fictions, asserting for the anchoress a greater degree of enclosure than she might experience in real life.

[335] As discussed above, the identification of the anchorhold with the anchoress's body is especially prominent in the Second part, in the passages concerned with the windows of the anchorhold and what may be seen through them. The aforementioned use of 'ehþurl eilþurl', 'eye-window' at f. 12b 20 makes this connection explicit.

to *Ancrene Wisse* not only by way of the allegory of the lady in the castle from the Seventh Part (as noted by Millett and Wogan-Browne),[336] but also linguistically. 'Anchorhold' is the usual modern word for an anchoress's dwelling, but the *Ancrene Wisse* itself uses the phrase 'ancre hus', 'anchoress house' (as at f. 114b/21).

Whether or not the recurrence of *domus* in these verses is an indicator of anchoritic influence, what both *Hali Meiðhad* and *Sawles Ward* share is the use of a building early on in the text as a structuring image for the treatise that follows. In *Hali Meiðhad*, this image dominates the opening passages, and in doing so conjures up a number of ideas, both didactic and thematic, which will sustain the argument through the rest of the treatise. Once this image has been introduced, it serves as a useful mental summary of many of the ideas that will follow, and which can be deduced from it by exercising the skills of memory. No further explicit mention of the building is therefore necessary. In *Sawles Ward* the situation is rather different, since here the image of the building is central to the conceit upon which the whole text is founded. It is usually described, following the *domus* of the Biblical verse, as a *hus* (as in 7, 8, 10, 26 etc.), but during the council of Wit and the four daughters of God, all of whom discuss how to defend the building from the attacks of the Devil, it is referred to as 'his [sc. God's] castel' (229). Similarly, Wit is called both 'hus(e)bonde' (e.g. 43, 226), that is, the head of a domestic household, and also, when there is some suggestion that the building is under threat, 'Godes cunestable' (e.g. 43, 226). Millett and Wogan-Browne translate the latter phrase as '[he] whom God has

[336] Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, p. xxvi.

made the commander of the stronghold' (p. 99), a rendering that does justice to the official force of the term in military and legal matters. This emphasis on the castle is reminiscent of the tower, and all that it implied, in *Hali Meiðhad.*

There is another important piece of landscape within *Sawles Ward*, described in a long speech by Fearlac (Fear). This is the landscape of hell, and it is one of the richest pieces of writing in the whole text. The opening of this passage is closely based on the Latin original, a dialogue called *De custodia interioris hominis*, of uncertain authorship.[337] In both the English and the Latin versions, the description is notable for what it fails to say, for what cannot in fact be said:

> Helle is wid wiðute met ant deop wiðute grund; ful of brune uneuenlich, for ne mei nan eorðlich fur euenin þertowart; ful of stench unþolelich, for ne mahte in eorðe na cwic þing it þolien; ful of sorhe untalelich, for ne mai na muð for wrecchdom ne for wa rikenin hit ne tellen. (94-98, p. 250)
>
> Hell is wide without measure and deep without bottom; full of incomparable fire, for no earthly fire may compare with it; full of insufferable stench, for no living thing on earth may suffer it; full of indescribable sorrow, for no mouth may count nor measure it for wretchedness and woe.

The recurrent notes in this passage are sounded by 'wiðute' and adjectives beginning in un-, both of which invite the audience to imagine a concept only to deny it immediately. This technique, the ineffability topos, is clearly very useful to writers, since it enables them to suggest extremes of the qualities or ideas that they wish to invoke, without requiring them to find concrete means to show how

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[337] The *De custodia* was previously ascribed (for example, by J.-P. Migne, in *PL*. clxxvi. 185-8) to Hugh of St. Victor, since it occurs in some manuscripts as chapters xiii-xv of Book IV of the treatise *De anima*, ascribed to Hugh. However, the *De custodia* circulated widely in the middle ages as a separate work in its own right, and this manuscript tradition associates it with St. Anselm. Some details of these attributions are given in Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*. p. 246. The Latin text itself is printed in R.W. Southern and F.S. Schmitt, eds. *Memorials of St. Anselm* (London, 1969), pp. 354-60. Southern and Schmitt also sketch some of the reasons for attributing the text to Anselm, on pp. 354-5. Their edition is used for all Latin quotations from this text, and references are to page and line.

intense these qualities are in the object that they are describing. However, its very ease makes it dangerous, since it can all to readily become an obvious (to the audience) means of evading the writer's responsibility to describe. This is avoided here first of all by careful patterning (two phrases centred on 'wiðute', followed by three parallel clauses of identical form). This is taken directly from the Latin source:

> *Infernus latus est sine mensura, profundus sine fundo, plenus ardore intolerabili, plenus fetore incomparabili, plenus dolori innumerabili.* (357/1-3)

Yet the English writer shows his skill as a stylist here, in that his version is not only idiomatically Engish, but in some ways an improvement on his Latin source. He expands the lines above, keeping the triple use of the *plenus* clauses but adding a second clause (beginning 'for ne mai/mahte') to each one. These added clauses preserve the power of the reiterated syntax, but make it less monotonous by increasing the distance between the beginning of one phrase and the next. At the same time, they add emphasis to the point being made, effectively restating the keyword in each clause.[338]

The English author further improves his Latin source by limiting the way in which ineffability is suggested. After the lines discussed above, the text departs from the Latin and moves on to use a different technique to evoke the strangeness, horror and unimaginable nature of hell. This new technique consists

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[338] The addition of these clauses must be for stylistic, rather than glossatory, reasons. Whilst *MED* does cite this passage as the earliest recorded instance of all three keywords (*uneuenlich*, *unþolelich* and *untalelich*), it also gives OE roots for the first two (Bosworth-Toller also include an entry for *unþoligendlich*), and posits a derivation from OE *tăle* for the third, citing parallels in Old Icelandic, Middle Low German and Middle Dutch. This suggests that the words would have been sufficiently familiar to be comprehensible. In any case, the added clauses are too close verbally to the originals to serve as glosses: it is surely no advance to be told that 'insufferable' means 'not able to be suffered.'

in the combination of contraries (paradox) or unlike things. Thus we are told '[s]e þicke is þrinne te þosternesse þet me hire mei grapin' ('the darkness is so thick there that one may grasp it', 98-9). It is impossible to imagine how darkness, the absence of light, can become something tangible – strictly, it cannot. This is precisely the point. To say that in hell the darkness is thick enough to clench in one's fist is not only to say that it is very dark, but also to say that it both is and is not like anything we can experience on earth.

In this synasthaesiac use of impossible combinations, other senses can be used besides touch. The writer now moves on to talk about apparent paradoxes of sight:

> For þet fur ne ȝeueð na liht, ah blent ham þe ehnen þe þer beoð wið a smorðrinde smoke, smeche forcuðest, ant tah i þet ilke swarte þeosternesse swarte þinges ha iseoð (99-102, pp. 250-1)
>
> For that fire gives no light, but blinds the eyes of those who are there with a smothering smoke, the foulest of smokes, and yet in that same black darkness they see black things

The smoke here is slightly out of place, a naturalistic attempt to explain how a fire can burn without illuminating, but the rest of the passage repeatedly insists on the paradoxical nature of the environment it depicts, especially in the tantalising invitation to imagine how 'black things' can be seen in 'black darkness' (what other kind of darkness can there be?).

The didactic purpose of this *ostranenie* (Shklovsky's term for literature's purpose, namely 'making things strange')[339] is to tell us that we cannot prepare for, contain or control hell in our minds: it is always unexpected, we will always

[339] See Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (Harlow, 1988), pp. 16-30.

be unprepared for it, and therefore it is always to be feared. But the negations throughout this passage are also more fundamentally apposite to the subject. It was often argued by medieval theologians that existence was a good in itself.[340] Thus if hell is a place devoid of all good, this creates a paradox, since it must exist as a place devoid of existence.[341] If such is its nature, then paradox and contradiction are intrinsically appropriate methods by which to describe hell, a non-place characterised by simultaneous being and non-being.

In comparison to Fearlac's portrayal of hell, the vision of heaven delivered by Liues Luue (Love of Life) is less impressive, but does draw on some of the same techniques, to make heaven a deliberate opposite to hell. The most notable characteristic of this description is that it focuses on people rather than the physicality of heaven. Beginning with the Trinity, the focus shifts to the person of the Son, thence to Mary and so to the angels and archangels; the patriarchs and prophets; the apostles; the martyrs; the confessors; and finally 'þet schene ant þet brihte ferreden of þe eadi meidnes' ('that radiant and bright company of the blessed maidens', 303-4). None of these is given a detailed physical setting, and where any indication of their environment is given it is cursory and adds little to the orthodox imagery, either in content or its use, in places being no more than a patchwork of Biblical quotations. Mary is 'sitten in a trone [...] swiðe briht wið ȝimmes istirret' ('sitting in a throne [...] very brightly starred with gems', 274-5), and the patriarchs and prophets are in the 'lont of blisse' ('land of bliss', 287). This reticence about surroundings may

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[340] Coincidentally, given the possible authorship of the *De custodia*, this point is central to Anselm's ontological proof of the existence of God. See the *Proslogion*, chapters 2-3 in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. I (Edinburgh, 1946), pp. 101-3.

arise from a desire to avoid any speculative comments which might offend against orthodoxy by going beyond what can be known or taught about heaven.

This desire can be seen in the comments of Liues Luue on the angelic hierarchies:

> Nihe wordes þer beoð, ah hu ha beoð i-ordret ant sunderliche isette, þe an buue þe oðre, ant euchanes meoster, were long to tellen. (282-4, p. 256)
>
> There are nine orders, but how they are ordered and variously arranged, one above another, and each one's duty, would take a long time to tell.

His reticence here is intriguing. There was no shortage of authorities to consult on the ordering of the angels: Pseudo-Dionysius was perhaps the most influential, but there were alternative schema proposed by Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville, amongst others.[342] Most agreed that there are nine classes of angelic beings (Jerome, who argued for seven, and Clement of Rome, with eleven, are perhaps the most prominent exceptions), but there were disagreements as to their ordering. By stating that there are nine orders, but that he will not describe them, the author hedges his bets, assenting to the most orthodox opinion on the number whilst avoiding any potential controversy. It is true that the *De custodia* gives no elaboration either,[343] but nor does the author of *Sawles Ward* expand his source here, as he so often does elsewhere. Moreover, he gives a different reason for his reticence. In the *De custodia*, the character of *Desiderium Vitae Aeternae* demurs from giving details of the orders on the grounds that they are beyond human powers to understand,

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[341] The medieval conception(s) of hell cannot be discussed here in detail, but a useful starting point is Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Aldershot, 1990).
[342] Several of these proposed hierarchies are collated and translated in Steven Chase, trans., *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels* (New York, 2002).
[343] *Sed nec istorum quidem gradus et dignitates, laudes quoque quas creatori suo referunt, ullus hominum plene cogitare, nedum enarrare, sufficit* (358/26-8).

let alone recount (*cogitare, nedum enarrare*). The writer of *Sawles Ward*, perhaps wanting to avoid any implied criticism of the theologians who had claimed to know such things, has Liues Luue excuse himself on the grounds that '[hit] were long to tellen'. If this really is evidence of the author's concern for orthodoxy at all costs, then it may explain the absence of the concrete in his description of heaven.

More characteristic of the rest of *Sawles Ward*, and indeed of many passages from *Ancrene Wisse*, are certain appeals to the senses in this description. It is perhaps significant that some of the most sensual details come in the passage relating to the company of the virgins in heaven. This section is of course highly relevant for the anchoritic audience to which the text is addressed, and it is not surprising to find that it receives special treatment.[344] The blessedness of their state is conveyed by appeals to three of the five senses: hearing, smell and sight.[345] The virgins are themselves beautiful, and they are given a unique and beautiful song to sing. In a deliberate inversion of the scenes in hell, these excellencies are again referred to using the inexpressibility topos: 'þe feierlac of hare wlite, þe swetnesse of hare song, ne mai na tunge tellen' ('the beauty of their splendour, the sweetness of their song, no tongue can tell', 307-8). The appeal to the sense of smell is, if anything, stronger, since it does not rely on the unimaginable: 'Se swote smeal ham folheð hwider se ha wendeð, þet me mahte libben aa bi þe swotnesse' ('Such a sweet smell follows them wherever they go, that one might live forever on the sweetness', 310-11). This is

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[344] Millett and Wogan-Browne (*Medieval English Prose for Women*, p. 157) note that *Sawles Ward* omits the references to monks in heaven found in the *De custodia*, but greatly expands the description of 'reward of virgins in heaven'.

a more definite type of description, focussing on what one *can* do as a result of the stimulus rather than on what one *cannot* do (for example, describe it). However, once again, this recalls the rhetorical techniques encountered in the description of hell, namely the combination of incompatible elements. No smell can actually sustain life, but because we understand what an attractive scent is, and we can understand what it is to be (for example) fully fed, we are made to feel that we understand the combination of the two. In this way, the text invites us to use the physicality of our senses to comprehend a realm in which physicality will change completely, and a perfume will be as sustaining as a meal.

An even stronger reminiscence of the techniques used to describe hell occurs in the appeals to the sense of sight. There, the paradox was that, in the presence of fires that give no light, black things can be seen in black darkness. Here, it is light rather than darkness which generates the near-paradoxes. The light of the Godhead, and that emanating from the throne of Mary, are both so bright that all earthly lights are like darkness in comparison (259-60, 274-6). Light characterises all aspects of the heavenly scene, suggesting attributes such as purity, beauty, power and so on. The boldest use of light is to suggest physical, rather than moral, attributes:

> Ha beoð all ase lithe ant ase swifte ase sunne-gleam þe scheot fram est into west as tin ehlid tuneð and openeð: for hwer se eauer þe gast wule, þe bodi is ananriht wiðute lettunge. (361-3, p. 259)
>
> They are all as light and as swift as sunlight which shoots from the east to the west as your eyelid closes and opens: for wherever the spirit wishes [to be], the body is immediately without hindrance.

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[345] In this context, where the audience is invited to enjoy the virgins' state through the senses, taste and touch are avoided presumably because of the erotic dangers inherent in them.

Thus the blessed beings in heaven do not only look like light, but behave like it too. Spirit regains the mastery over body, but also over all physicality.

In one sense, the whole description of heaven is about sight, since Liues Luue continually talks of what he saw.[346] He tells us at that he comes 'riht from heouene' (247), but talks of its inhabitants as 'ha' ('they'): whilst he has personal experience of heaven, he is apparently not one of the blessed. As an audience, we know that he is simply an allegorical figure, that his purpose is not so much to give special revelations of what was hitherto unknown, but to remind his audience of what is already revealed and taught. For that reason we may not expect him to have seen God 'nebbe to nebbe' ('face to face', 332) – but exactly what can we expect him to have seen? He makes it clear from the start that his vision of God in heaven is incomplete:

> Ich habbe isehen him ofte, nawt tah alswa as he is – for a3ein þe brihtnesse and te liht of his leor þe sunne-gleam is dosc ant þuncheð a schadewe; ant forþi ne mahte Ich nawt a3ein þe leome of his wlite lokin ne bihalden, bute þurh a schene schawere bituhhe me ant him þet schilde mine ehnen (258-62)
>
> I have seen him often, though not just as he is – for compared to the brightness and the light of his face the sunlight is dark and seems a shadow; and therefore I could not look or gaze at the glow of his countenance, except through a bright mirror between me and him which shielded my eyes.

This is the prose style of *Sawles Ward* at its direct, idiomatic and supple best, and it echoes 1 Timothy 6.16, quoted in the *De custodia* (358/9-10), which states that God *lucem habitat inaccessibilem* (' inhabiteth light inaccessible'). But an oddity is raised by the use of the 'schene schawere'. This phrase translates the words *per speculum et in enigmate*, found at this point in the *De custodia* but ultimately derived from 1 Corinthians 13.12: *videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem* ('We see now through a glass in a dark

manner: but then face to face'). The phrase in the passage from Corinthians makes it clear that such a perspective is available to Christians on earth in any case: *videmus nunc*. If this is so, then the use of this image here, instantly recognisable as coming from the verse quoted above, implies that the messenger who has been in heaven has seen no more than if he had never been there. Just like him, we too see now 'through a glass'.[347]

Given the diversity of types of text represented by these six works; the fact that some are translations of much older texts, others piece together a patchwork of sources, and still others seem to write large amounts of original material; and the uncertainty that still surrounds the precise circumstances of the production of CCCC MS 402 and MS Bodley 34, it is not surprising to find that landscape is handled in different ways in each text. Nor, given the didactic and pastoral role of much of this writing, is it surprising that landscapes are on the margins of the text, glimpsed or suggested fleetingly while the author moves on to seemingly more important matters. What is striking is that, in spite of all of this, landscape and spatial setting still have such an important role to play in all six works. Whether the resonances of a particular image are political, ecclesiastical, Biblical, literary or highly personal (in their reference to an anchoress's own enclosed situation), they all work to the same end, namely the

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[346] See for example 269, 273, 276, 286, 290, 295, 299, 303 and others.

[347] Allegorical figures journey to heaven elsewhere in literature of the period. Phronesis ('Prudence') is guided there by Theology in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* (trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto, 1973), pp. 136-55), but here there is no hint of apology or suggestion of imperfect vision, rather the opposite: 'abandoning things petty, I now pluck a mightier chord and laying aside entirely the role of poet, I appropriate a new speaking part, that of prophet. The earthly Apollo will yield to the heavenly Muse; the Muse will give place to Jupiter; the language of earth will yield to and wait on the language of heaven and Earth will give way to Olympus.' (p. 146.)

development of intellectual or spiritual ideas that are suggested or discussed over much larger stretches of the text.

As I hope I have shown, the performance of this function by landscape and spatial features is borne out by the way in which close examination of the sparse details of setting given within these texts ties in with, connects, complicates and fruitfully combines the key thoughts of each text in turn. Moreover, such scrutiny of landscape and setting can also show connections between texts in this group, whether those connections take the form of words, images or interpretative viewpoints. In this way, landscape is used within the AB-language group not only to enhance and direct the reading experience of individual texts, but also to help an anchoritic audience to be active in its reading, to notice similarities between the texts and to interpret and reinterpret one idea (a tower, a prison) from the perspectives of several different genres. Reading each text allows one to understand all the others better, and the crucial conversations between the texts are carried out by, amongst other things, landscape and spatial imagery. Thus the teaching contained within these texts is complementary and their combination is very probably designed to allow each to comment on the others. Landscape provides tantalising evidence of the coherence of this library of six texts.

Conclusions

The texts, eras and subjects covered in this thesis have necessarily been diverse, and it will be useful to summarise my argument in concluding it.

In the first chapter, I have tried to point to some of the characteristically medieval ways of perceiving the world, and the implications that they have for our reading of landscapes in medieval literature. I have argued firstly that, for an educated medieval audience, the world was not simply a place in which significant things happened, but was itself a site of signification. As the work of the Creator God, it bore his imprint and taught about his character. For this reason, it seems likely that the literate class of medieval England were predisposed to seek meaning in the physical world around them. Moreover, non-physical worlds were also susceptible to a similar interpretation. When encountered in the Bible, landscapes and physical spaces were subjected to multiple interpretations, literal but also anagogical and tropological, just like all other aspects of the sacred text. This multi-layered hermeneutic was perhaps most prevalent in the High Middle Ages of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before Hugh of St. Victor and his intellectual descendants who stressed the importance of the literal meaning in interpreting Scripture, but even after them it did not die out. Hugh and those who followed him certainly showed that the literal sense was of first importance, but even in their own writings they explained that one advantage of such an approach was that a firm understanding of the literal meaning would make any subsequent symbolical meanings more secure. In one sense, the literalists paradoxically made symbolical interpretations

more possible. Since the study of the Bible was the discipline from which wider medieval literary theory was generated, this ability to read symbolic meanings into the landscapes presented in the Biblical texts seems to me likely to have been carried over into secular reading as well. Indeed, other scholars have already argued that theories worked out in medieval theological and philosophical texts had a profound effect on other forms of literature from the period:

> Scholastic literary theory did not merely provide these poets [sc. Gower and Chaucer] with technical idioms: it influenced directly or indirectly the ways in which they conceived of their literary creations; it affected their choice of authorial roles and literary forms.[348]

As a result, it is not only valid but necessary to explore the extent of this influence on secular literature, to see the ways in which parts of the meaning of these texts are conveyed through landscape.

In the second chapter, I have examined some of the landscape archetypes that would have been familiar to educated audiences of the Middle Ages. A few of these landscapes are drawn from the classical literature which formed such an important part of the Latin curriculum, but even more important were those landscapes from the Bible discussed in pages 39-64. To illustrate the imaginative influence of which these landscapes were capable, I have traced the uses to which some of them were put in writings from the period. In doing so, I have hoped to demonstrate not only that extensive traditions of interpretation were built up around these mental landscapes, but also that such landscapes formed part of the interpretative machinery with which educated medieval minds made sense of the world around them, whether physical or literary.

Having made these points, I have used my remaining three chapters to examine and elucidate the various ways in which such habits of mind can be seen at work in highly disparate forms of writing. Since I am interested in examining a habit of mind that I believe to have been more or less pervasive amongst educated medieval people, almost any texts from the period, having of necessity been written and copied by someone more or less educated, would have served to illustrate the point. However, I have chosen, not quite arbitrarily, three different strands of writing which together cover (pseudo)history, writing for entertainment or 'diversion', and sober religious instruction. (It is important to note that, whilst the three groups of texts studied here do indeed, taken together, cover these three modes of writing, no one mode can be exclusively associated with any one of the three text-groups.) Thus they provide evidence for the widespread importance of landscape as a means of communicating ideas, whilst testifying to the diversity of ways in which it could be used for this purpose.

The first such form of writing to be examined was the Arthurian chronicle. My reason for choosing this genre was its curious omission from the large body of scholarship dealing with the symbolic role of landscape in Arthurian writings. This scholarship has tended to focus on the tales of Arthur which are considered to be 'romances', rather than those which purport to be histories in some sense, that is to say, more or less reliable accounts of things that actually happened. Unpicking this assumption, and insisting on the 'unreal' nature of the world of Arthurian chronicle allows us to see how widespread was

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[348] Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, p. 160.

the habit of seeing landscape in meaningful terms. More locally, it shows the extent to which brilliant men such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Laȝamon were able to mark out their ideas in landscape. They could use the understanding of landscape that they anticipated, to some extent, in their audience, whether from knowledge of the Bible or (in Geoffrey's case) from Celtic myth, and manipulate this knowledge so as to guide the audience's reception and interpretation of their texts. For Geoffrey, this meant that he could hint at Arthur's links to the supernatural world of giants and to the heroic world of classical epic. For Wace, landscape was a means of allowing his text to talk about civilisation and barbarism, in terms that were readily applicable to his own context, the political events of his own day, and the national/racial ideas that permeated and shaped them. For Laȝamon, landscape also helped to define the character of his Arthur, through interplay with texts from the Bible. In all of these cases, what appear at first to be attempts to recount historical events, admittedly from a biased perspective, turn out to be artfully constructed tales, works which use landscape in highly literary and intertextual ways, in order to shape the response in an audience and suggest, in a way that now seems to us covert, how they want to be interpreted.

The second group of texts that I have examined is more disparate, since debate poems are united as a genre not so much by their subject matter as by elements of their form. In spite of this diversity, I have shown that landscape can provide important information for our reading of these texts, not least in giving clues as to the probable evolution of the debate poem from the classical eclogue, chiefly Virgil. I have argued that landscape was an important part of these

literary antecedents, showing how elements such as seeking shade and coming down from the hills give rise to some of the most characteristic settings for debate poetry in Middle English. This is evident in several of the poems examined in the chapter, but particularly in *The Owl and the Nightingale*. The landscapes of that poem proved to be particularly fruitful for analysis, with the opening providing a host of suggestions as to how the poem might be read. These suggestions include the hint of liminality, where two types of landscape abut one another, each being associated with one of the two protagonists, re-enforcing from the start the strong opposition of sides but also alluding to otherworldliness, or the unreal. The landscape description also provides some evidence regarding the possible provenance of the poem itself. More importantly, I have argued that the poem consistently adopts a strategy of duping the audience into imagining that they can predict the outcome of the debate, a joke whose punch-line is the refusal to resolve the argument in favour of either bird. Important elements of this strategy are entrusted to landscape alone: the strategy is initiated by the opening landscape description, and furthered by a change in the Nightingale's position at the climax of the poem.

In considering other debate Middle English poems, I have argued that their landscapes show the interpenetration of several poetic traditions as the period progresses, and that these associations with other texts and textual practices are sometimes deliberately drawn on by the debate poets in order to stimulate a particular kind of reading. These texts vary from contemporary poetic traditions such as the dream vision, to passages from the Bible and Classical epic, and thus landscape allusion can be used to further theological

teaching, to suggest a privileged 'visionary' status for the narrator, or in unconscious emulation of a high-status text.

I have further argued that, in the case of a poem such as *Winner and Waster*, the audience is invited to draw on their non-textual experience, from jousts or trials by combat, in order to respond appropriately to the text, and that this invitation is once again made through landscape details. Moreover, landscape in that poem is carefully contrived in such a way as to invite the careful reader to make comparison between the world of the dream, the world of the dreamer and the world of the audience outside the poem. It is thus thematically and structurally important in making an audience apply the satirical argument of the poem to a real-life situation, the very point of satire itself.

For my third and final set of texts, I turned to *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group. Here I have shown how landscape functions in relation to the notion of the anchorhold. In some cases, it qualifies the seclusion of the anchorhold by taking the audience on a mental journey beyond its walls into the world that has supposedly been rejected by the anchoress. Such a qualification takes place whenever reference is made, as in *Ancrene Wisse* itself, to landscape features that belong to the world outside the anchorhold, but especially where such landscape features are used in order to construct or explain the life inside it.

The hypothetical seclusion of the anchoress is also qualified to an extent by landscape images in texts from the Katherine Group which seem likely to have been intended for an anchoritic audience. In *Hali Meiðhad* it is the image

of the tower which introduces resonances from the contemporary political world, and which also introduces a number of ideas related to class and aspiration that recur throughout the whole of this short text. In *Sawles Ward*, it is not a tower but a house which dominates the mental space of the text and, in doing so, draws attention to the image of a house which runs throughout these texts as a model for the anchorhold. Even more strikingly, the anchorhold is also interpreted as a prison, not only in the *Ancrene Wisse*, but also in *Saint Marherete*. This recurrence of spatial imagery not only adds to the linguistic evidence linking these texts into a cohesive collection, but also shows that their keen interest in understanding what it means to be an anchoress is explored partly through images of space. The use of spatial and landscape imagery as a means to explore the nature of the anchoritic life is explicit in the *Ancrene Wisse*, but it also takes place indirectly through the tracts and saints' lives within this group, which were also intended for an anchoritic audience.

Two objections need now to be answered. The first is that the selection of texts considered here is arbitrary. To an extent, this is quite true. As mentioned above, the phenomenon that I claim to describe here, if real, could be found to a greater or lesser extent in any text. Given this, the choice of which texts to use as illustration of the theory is relatively free, but not without reason or purpose. I have deliberately chosen texts that cover a wide variety of genres or purposes, to demonstrate how widespread the suggestive and complex use of landscape is. I have also placed a particular emphasis on the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, partly because this is arguably the age of writing in English which is closest to the flowering of symbolic Biblical hermeneutics in the twelfth

century, but also because it is a period of English literary history that remains under-studied and often under-valued.

The most coherent of the three groups I have examined is the last, since the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse* share language, probable provenance and date. The Arthurian texts that I have examined are not linked linguistically, since only one of them is in English, but form a logical and coherent selection, starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth and continuing through the earliest major translations and adaptations of his work by Wace and then La3amon. The centrepiece of my study of the debate poems, *The Owl and The Nightingale*, also belongs to the early Middle English period, although later within it if Cartlidge's re-dating is correct.[349] In that chapter, however, I have also found it useful and logical to follow the development of the debate into the later Middle English period.

Each of these groups could readily be expanded upon logical lines. The Wooing Group has clear affinities with the Katherine Group, and the spatial practices in other anchoritic texts, such as the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich, or the *Life* of Christina of Markyate, would make a useful point of comparison for those studied here. Similarly, there is a wealth of debate literature in Latin and Anglo-Norman which I have not had space to consider here; nor has it been possible within the confines of this thesis to examine the continuing transformation of landscapes in later texts based on Arthurian chronicles, such as the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, or even sections of Malory. However, a limit has

[349] See footnote 200 above.

to be set somewhere in order to make the potentially endless subject manageable. I have therefore sought breadth in the types of text that I have studied, but internal coherence within each of the three limited groups used to support my thesis.

The second objection that could be raised is that much of what I have been arguing is speculative and unprovable. Once again, it must be acknowledged that there is some justice in this charge, but I would counter that this is in the nature of the object, rather than in the manner of the study. What I have tried to do is to discover from textual evidence a phenomenon which, if it existed, was only party textual in nature. In effect, I have been trying to trace the way in which medieval writers thought about something other than the main subject about which they were writing. The evidence that their texts provide will therefore be incidental, rather than central, to what they say. It is for the scholar interested in the history of thought and perception to fill the gaps between medieval theories of space and reading, on the one hand, and the practice of dealing with these issues in texts concerned with other matters, on the other. Filling these gaps must therefore always be a matter of more or less informed speculation. However, I hope that in the foregoing pages I have provided at least some evidence to demonstrate that the characteristically medieval ways of perceiving the physical environment, whether presented to the senses or the imagination, were rich and imaginative. Moreover, these ways of perceiving were instrumental in helping to produce complex and richly rewarding texts of all kinds, texts that deserve careful and close attention to the details of their

cultural moment in order that we may better appreciate their artistry and extraordinary beauty.

Bibliography

Note: editions are listed alphabetically by the first important word in the title, or occasionally by the part of the title most likely to be sought by a reader, where this is not the same (e.g. *A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster* is placed under *w* rather than *g*).

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